

BONUS FULL-COLOR PINUP OF MAGNIFICENT MURACO!

January 1982

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PRO Wrestling ILLUSTRATED

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SPORTS

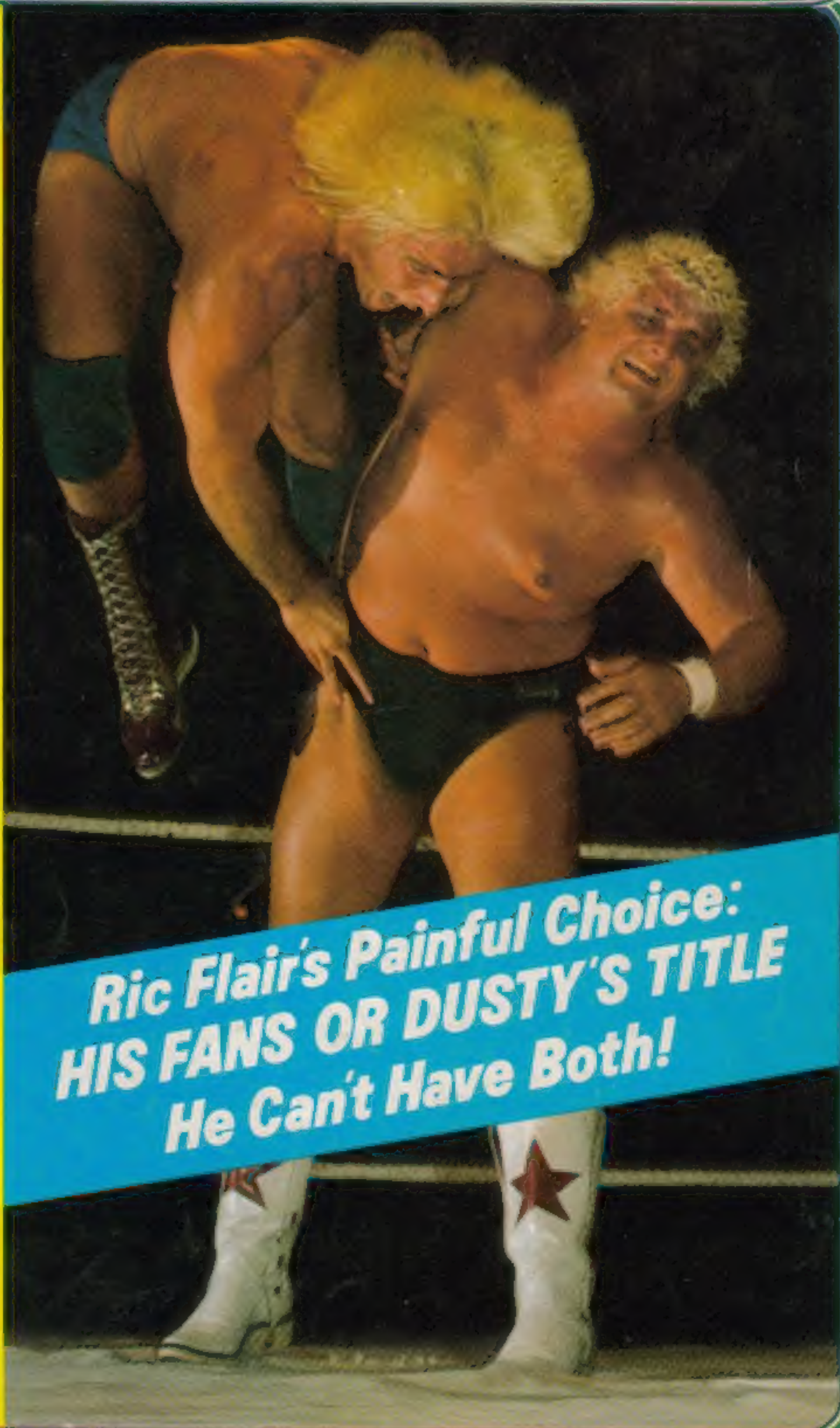
**HULK HOGAN:
"THAT TROPHY
BELONGS TO ME!"**



**THE VON ERICHS:
HARLEY RACE'S
ROADBLOCK
TO THE NWA TITLE**

**IVAN KOLOFF'S
DEATH-GRIP ON THE
MID-ATLANTIC TITLE**

**Tony Atlas' Fear:
"I DON'T THINK
THE FANS WILL
FORGIVE ME"**



**Ric Flair's Painful Choice:
HIS FANS OR DUSTY'S TITLE
He Can't Have Both!**

KING'S COURT

By Peter King



Bobby Heenan and Nick Bockwinkel, after one final strategy conference, emerge from the dressing room and make their way through the corridor to the ring.

THE LETTER LAY unopen on my desk for three days. It wasn't that I was ignoring it. It's just that my desk is, well, kind of sloppy. Finally, after three days worth of coffee stains decorating the envelope, I decided to see what was inside.

I suppose I had put off reading it on purpose, like a man who tries to make bad news disappear by ignoring it. After all, I reasoned, any letter with Bobby Heenan's home address on the upper left corner can't be good news.

But I was wrong. Where I thought Heenan would be complaining about a story we had done, instead there was praise. Generally, his letters open with a salutation like "Dear Creep" or "Hey, Stupid." But this letter began with a friendly "My Good Friend, Peter."

It seemed that Bobby wanted me to come out to the AWA and spend a few days with Nick Bockwinkel. "Peter, old buddy," the letter said, "I believe, and Nicholas concurs,

that if you would venture forth into the AWA, America's heartland, for a few days, it would do a world of good for your popular publications. I know that if you observe Nicholas in action for a few days, your somewhat harsh opinion of him will change."

Actually, it wasn't a bad idea. I haven't been to the AWA area in about a year. This little push from my "friend" Bobby was just what I needed. What follows are transcripts from my reporter's diary of my visit to Heenanland.

SUNDAY (Night): Arrive at the airport in Minneapolis. Just off the jet and through the gate I see the innocent face of Bobby Heenan. "Welcome, welcome," he says. "Can I buy you dinner? How about a cup of coffee? What about a Twin Cities souvenir? You want me to get you an autographed baseball from the Minnesota Twins? There's a gift shop right over there." I told Heenan I would rather go to my hotel and relax. "Let me drive you. I'll hire a limo. Hey, I'll buy you a limo." Again, thanks, but no thanks. I'll take a cab, I told him.

MONDAY (The Arena): Bockwinkel is scheduled to wrestle Greg Gagne. In the dressing room, there is little conversation between Heenan and Bockwinkel. During the match, Heenan does not stay in Bockwinkel's corner. Instead, he takes a seat next to me. The match begins scientifically, but soon degenerates into a brawl. Heenan points out to me every illegal maneuver Gagne uses. When Bockwinkel cheats, though, Heenan is silent.

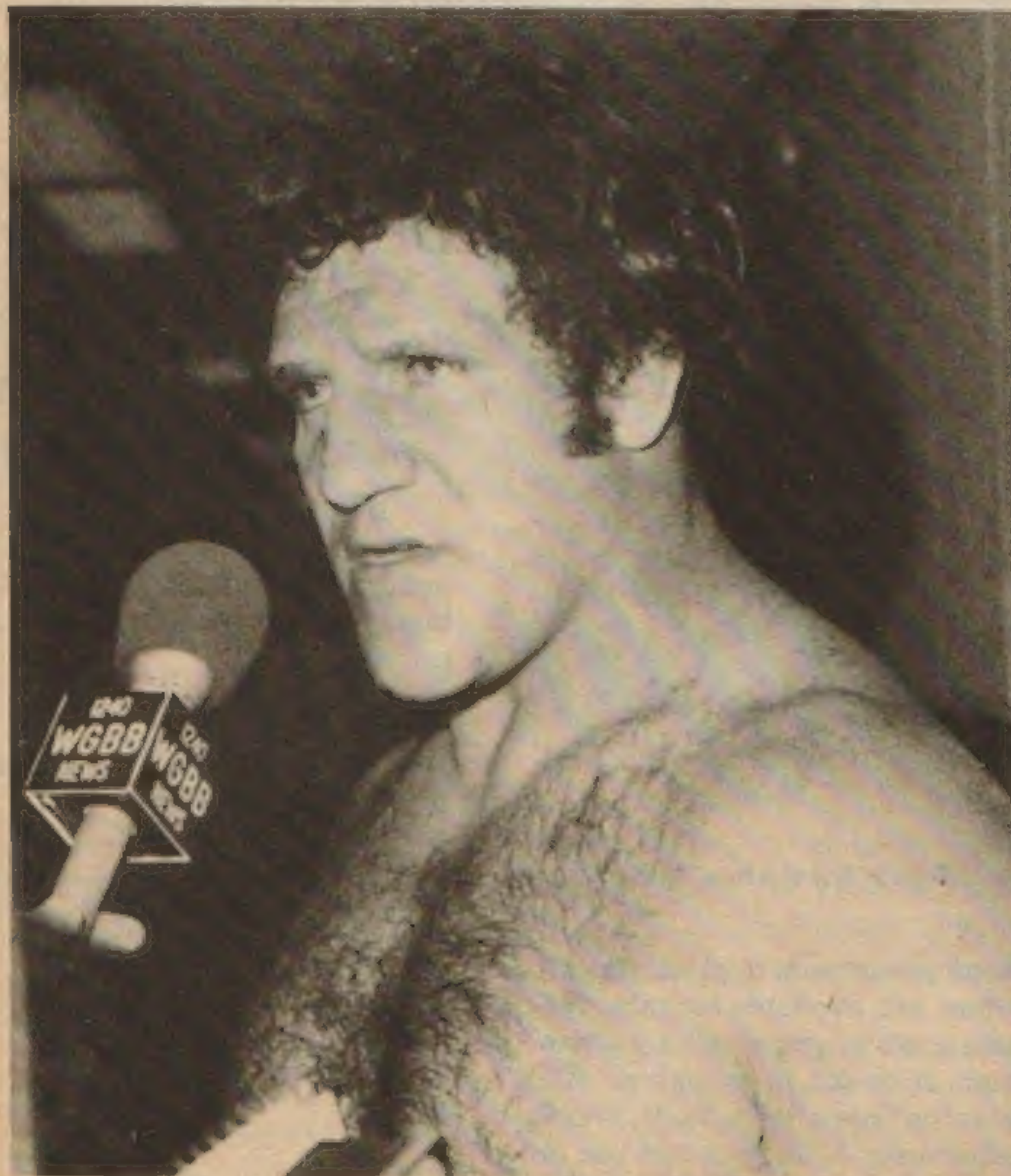
(Continued on page 52)

RINGSIDE

With Bill Apter

THE BIGGEST NEWS of the month, and probably the year, is that two-time WWF champion Bruno Sammartino, the "Living Legend" of wrestling, has decided to call it quits after 22 years in the sport (see "Wrestling Enquirer," page 24). Look for full coverage of his final match plus details of his retirement in an upcoming issue.

Mil Mascaras has changed his plans and now intends to stay in the WWF for a longer period of time than originally intended. If you recall, in the December issue, Mil stated that he thought his services were no longer needed in the Federation. He felt that the scientific community had a pretty good grip on the entire rulebreaker



Bruno Sammartino, hero to countless millions throughout the world, has decided to end his fabulous career. The "Living Legend" will be sorely missed.



Freebird Michael Hayes has taken a major stride in his quest to be a fan favorite in winning the trust of Andre the Giant. The two make a formidable tag team.

situation.

"I can see that I made an error," Mil told us. "Now that Mr. Fuji, Mr. Saito, and Greg Valentine have come to the area, I must stay and help."

It appears that everyone in Georgia is starting to trust Freebird Michael Hayes. "He protects his partner very well," says Andre the Giant. "I hope he is sincere about keeping his nose out of the dirt. I have started to trust him. Even though I'm not sure I like him, I feel secure in tag team matches with him at my side."

Captain Lou Albano predicts that Mr. Fuji and Mr. Saito will capture the WWF tag team title the next time they clash with champions Tony Garea and Rick Martel. Why have they failed to

(Continued on page 64)

DRESSING CONFIDENTIAL ROOM

By Stu Saks

I MUST ADMIT, I had prejudged the man. I guess I've just had bad experiences with the children of wealthy parents. Usually, I find they are stuck-up, hollow, uninspired human beings. The easy lives their parents provide completely ruin them as human beings, and while *normal* people detest them, they don't care. Why should they care about *those kind people* when they have their own circle of *beautiful people* to associate with. Stuck-up, hollow, uninspired people.

Quite frankly, this assignment didn't thrill me.

The flight from New York to Atlanta did not exactly put me in a great mood to start with. I kept thinking about Steve Farhood's "The Insider" column (November/1981) in which he reported a rumor that George Steele had become an air traffic controller. The rumor, of course, was proven false. Nevertheless, I was shaking until the jet came to a complete stop on the runway.

Airports are probably the coldest places in the world. Every face you see is a new face, and all I get is this lousy feeling that makes me want to turn around and go home. Waiting at the baggage carousel is always a great time.

Unless your baggage comes out right away, you start to fantasize about which country they might have been sent to. My luggage always seems to come out last.

All in all, between my assignment, George Steele, and my lost luggage, I wasn't feeling all too well. Somebody tapped me on the shoulder, but I ignored it. It was probably some old lady asking for my hard-earned position directly in front of the conveyor belt.

"Stu, Stu Saks?" a voice inquired. I turned around and looked down on the smiling face of none other than Bruno Sammartino Jr.

"My dad phoned me and said you were coming to Atlanta," he said. "I know what it's like to be a stranger in town, so I called your office and found out what flight you were coming in on."

He extended his hand in friendship, and I did the same. The son of the rich man, who

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Bruno Sammartino Jr. is gaining respect, not only as a skilled wrestler, but as a fine human being.

WFOCUS

With CRAIG PETERS

OUT OF CONTROL

Sometimes I just don't understand what's going on in the world of professional wrestling. First it's Magnificent Muraco, and now the Andersons. Brothers Gene and Ole recently came out with a declaration stating, in a nutshell, that they like to cheat. Wrestle one of them, they say, and you're going to wind up facing both of them. Wrestle against both of them in a tag team formation, and who

knows what to expect! The next thing you know, we'll be seeing them come into the ring with chain-link belts and tire irons. If the campaign against rules doesn't cease soon, maybe they should be forced to wrestle each other. Give 'em all a taste of their own medicine, then see how anxious they are to break a rule after having their skulls split with brass knuckles. It's getting to be like a gang war out there!

Harley Race continues to plug along. I, for one, hope he manages to pull it together and make another successful play for the championship. Think of it: an unprecedented seven championship reigns. That would leave Lou Thesz in the dust, allowing Race to stand alone in the record books. A lot of people look upon Race as a washed-up ex-champ unable to even survive for a few minutes in the ring, much less come back to claim a championship belt again. I think he can do it, though, and I look forward to his next title shot with the anticipation that it will be a successful one.

BACK IN THE RACE



HARLEY RACE

LARRY Z RETURNS

It's good to see that Larry Zbyszko is going to be back in the ring soon. Fresh from a short stint in show biz, both in television and in the recording industry, Larry is psyched for action again, and thirsting for the blood of Bruno Sammartino. As far as I'm



LARRY ZBYSZKO

concerned, though, his comeback is a pain... Now I have to learn how to spell Zbyszko correctly. Maybe to make it easier on everybody we should start calling him Larry Z, just like we call Steve Olsonowski Steve O.

(Continued on page 56)

A ON ASSIGNMENT

BY STEVEN FARHOOD

AFTER GETTING MYSELF arrested and spending a night in jail in Atlantic City last month, I was sure of two things: Liz Hunter would never go away for a weekend with me again, and Peter King and Matt Brock would never again send me on a story that had even a remote connection to gambling.

Wrong on both counts.

Liz sent me roses (love those liberated women) as soon as we got back to New York, and on the

card she suggested we go to the Tito Puente concert together next month. And as soon as I walked into the office my first day back from Atlantic City, Brock and King gave me my next assignment: an interview with Backdoor Huey, the world's foremost wrestling oddsmaker and handicapper.

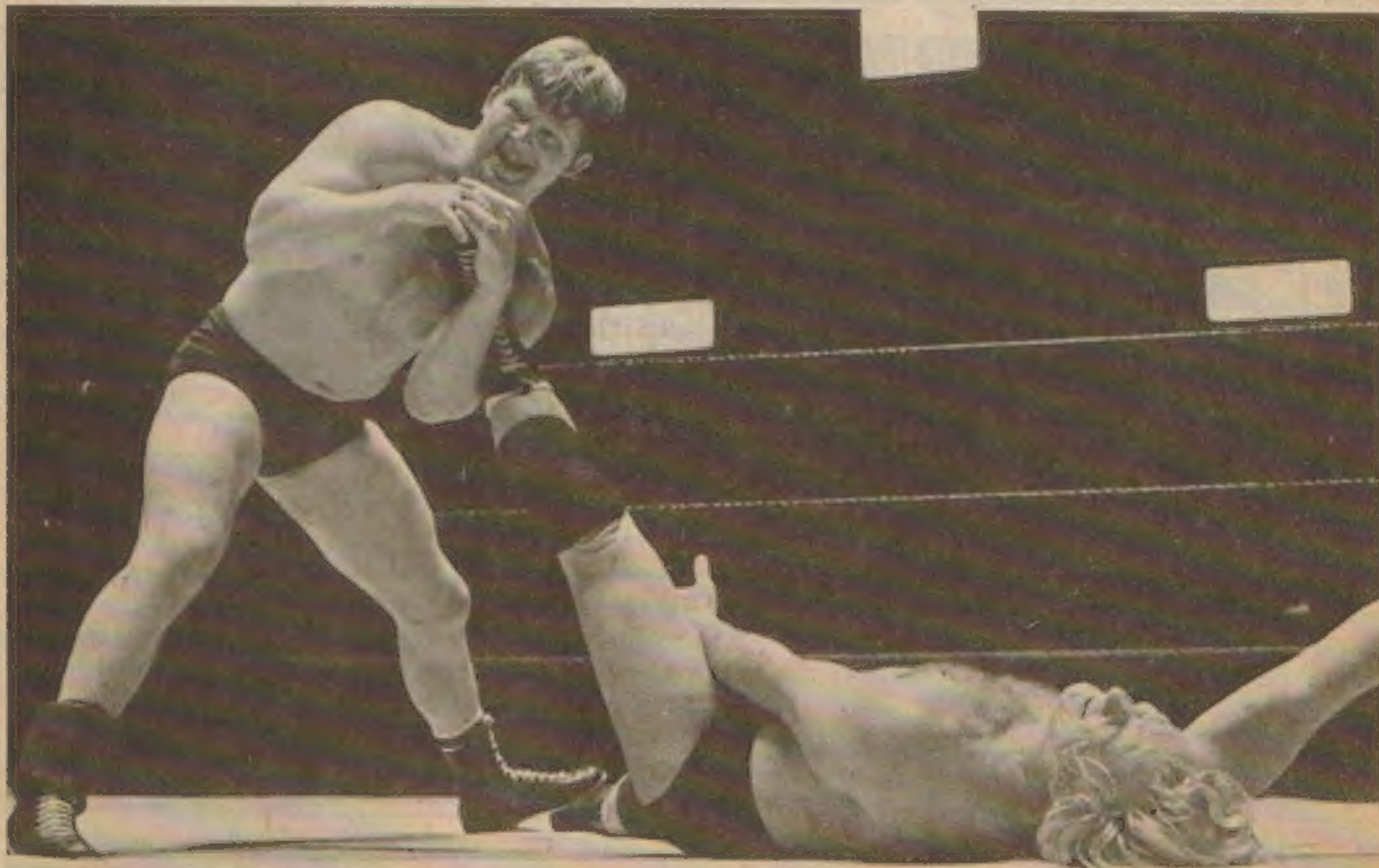
I can't tell you much about Huey's background, and, since what he does is illegal in the state he works in (sports

gambling is only legal in Nevada), I can't even tell you what city I traveled to. In fact, if I saw Huey tomorrow, I wouldn't know it was him. He wore a black hooded mask throughout our two-hour long interview.

"Can never be too careful," he pointed out.

What Huey does affects gamblers throughout the world. The week before a big card at the Omni in Atlanta or the Garden in

(Continued on page 51)



The odds on a match between WWF champion Bob Backlund and AWA champion Nick Bockwinkel would vary depending on which part of the country the bet was placed, according to wrestling handicapper Backdoor Huey. Backlund and Bockwinkel wrestled to a draw in 1979.

If you wish to contribute to Shocket's mailbag, send your letters to:

TOP ROPE
Box 48
Rockville Centre, N.Y.
11571

OFF THE O ROPE

By Dan Shocket

I WANT TO thank all the sweet people who objected to my reference to Tommy Rich as wormslime. Your gentle reprimands brightened my day. It's nice to know that wormslime Rich has fans whose brains are stuffed with cockroach shells. Still, it's nice to think that mental defectives have found a hero they can identify with. Question: How would you get everyone on the East Coast with an I.Q. under 30 into one arena? Answer: Have Bob



I don't know what Tommy is Rich in, but it certainly isn't intelligence.

Backlund and Tommy Rich form a tag team and sell tickets. And now onto the mail.

Dear Mr. Shocket,

I recently bought the 1981 October edition of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*.

I turned straight to your column to read what lies you wrote about this time. I thought the article you wrote about Tommy Rich and Kevin Von Erich was a disgrace to the magazine.

Tommy and Kevin are champions because they are true wrestlers and stay within the rules. I can't say that much for you, Mr. Shocket.

LISA LEESON
Lakeland, GA

Dear Ms. Leeson,

If Rich and Von Erich are true champions, then Miss Piggy is a true beauty. Don't let it upset you, though, Lisa. You're young yet, and the young are allowed to be foolish.

Dear Stupid,

I read a response you wrote to a letter and it made me sick! Just who do you think you're

cutting down when you insult Ted DiBiase?

I'm a number-one fan of Ted's and I sure in the heck ain't like wormslime! You might be, but I'm not! You're just jealous of Ted.

Ted will always be a champion to me and nothing will ever change that! So stop cutting him down, you jerk!

SUE RAWLINS
Bay City, MI

Dear Reader,

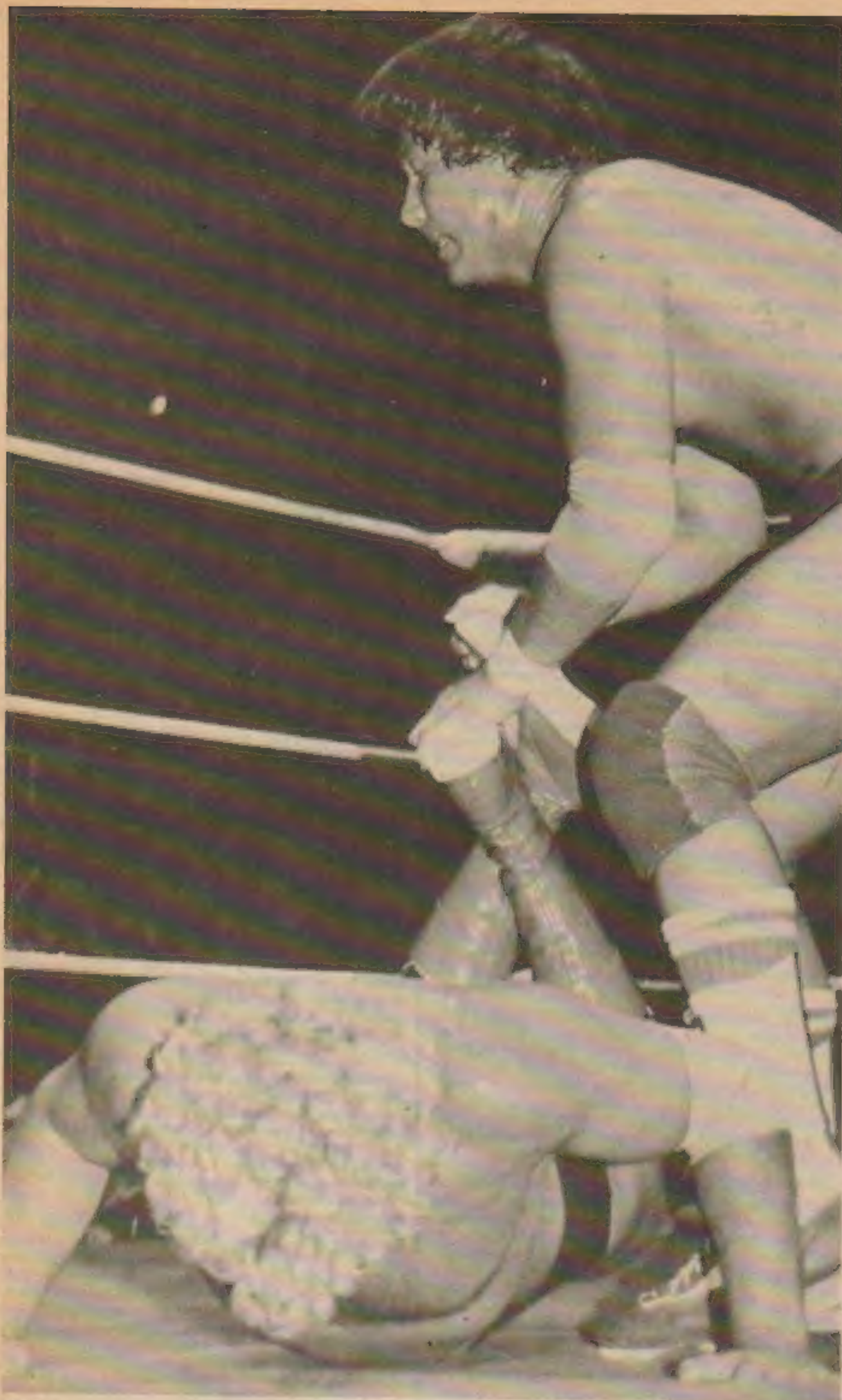
In the grand scheme of things, the fact that DiBiase is a champion to you is of incomparably little significance. As to whether or not you are wormslime, don't risk putting it up to a vote.

Dear Dan,

I'm surprised that you think my favorite wrestler, Ted DiBiase, isn't a very good wrestler. Well, I just for once would like to see you get in the ring with him.

If I ever see you coming down the street, I'll punch you out.

JAMES WATKINS
Augusta, KA

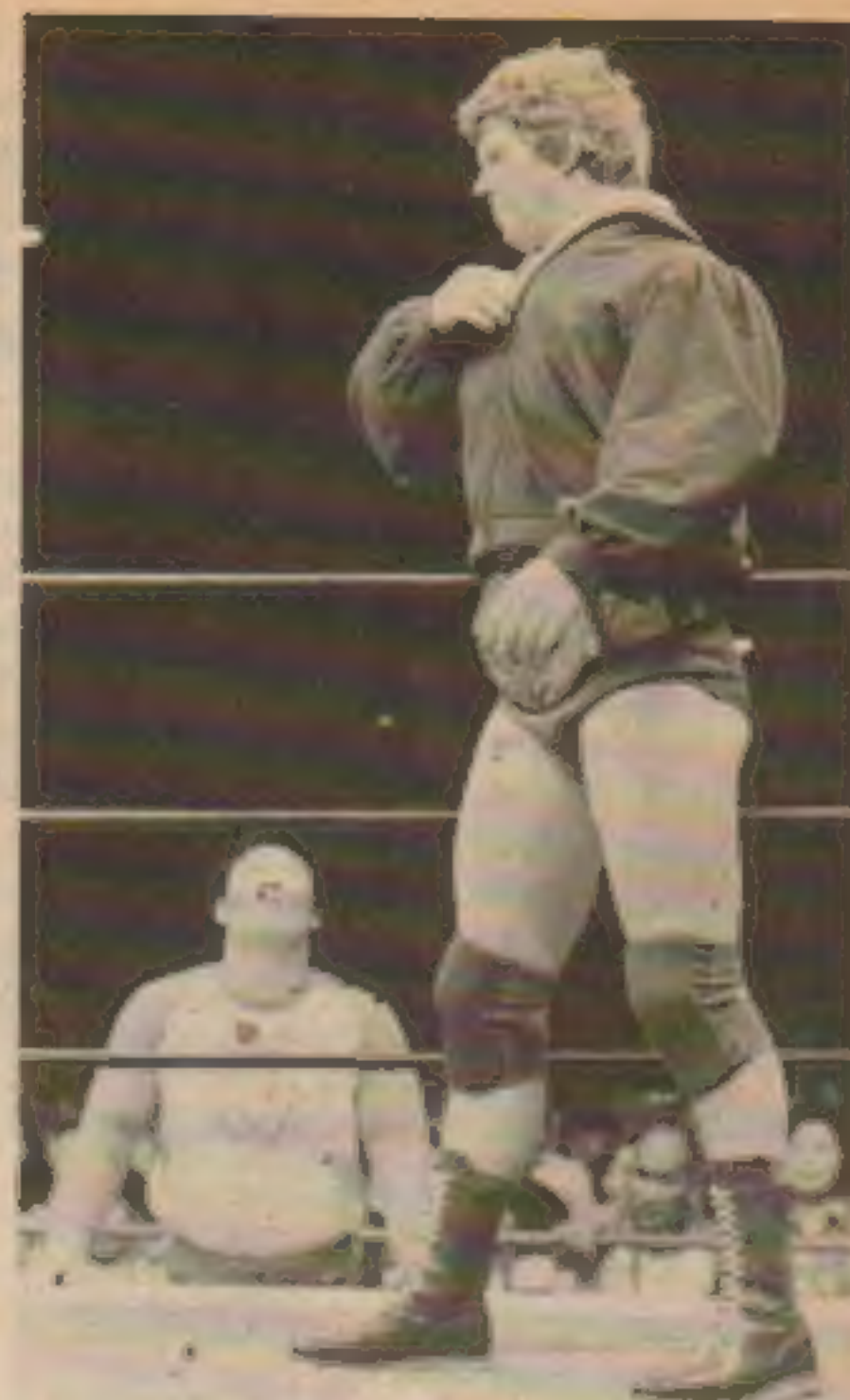


This is truly a rare photo. Ted DiBiase actually in control of a match. I guess you've got to love him. Anybody with that little talent who has the moxy to climb into the ring, you've just got to love him. Come on, Ted, the only people you are fooling your foolish fans.

Dear Jimbo,

I'll try to make this simple enough for you to understand. Whether DiBiase can beat me in a wrestling match is not the point. He has to be able to beat other professional wrestlers. I am a writer. Would it make sense to challenge Ted to come

to my office and try to write an intelligent sentence? Against professional wrestlers, DiBiase is a disgrace. As for your threat about punching me, if I'm ever stuck in Augusta, Kansas, I figure getting beaten will be typical of the luck that got me to that jerkwater town.



Bobby Backlund also gets by without talent, but he's got a big bankbook that referees draw from regularly.

Dear Mr. Shocket,

I don't know why you give all the credit to Larry Zbyszko and the mean guys. I think you should give a little more credit to Bob Backlund.

Bob is the one who is WWF champion, the one who beat George "The Animal" Steele, Killer Khan, and King Kong Mosca. Mr. Shocket, you really should give much more credit to Bob Backlund because he deserves it.

MIKE COONEY
Jersey City, NJ

Dear Mr. Cooney,

I always give credit to Bob Backlund. I'm the first to congratulate him on so successfully bribing the referees. No one praises him more for faithfully doing whatever the WWF officials ask of him. And certainly, when one realizes how much money he has made while possessing no skill at all, we should all tip our hats to his accomplishments. If he could only wrestle, he'd be just about perfect. □

Wahoo Wins U.S. Title From Roddy Piper

BY BILL APTER

GREENSBORO, NC—In one of the toughest matches he ever wrestled, Wahoo McDaniel took the U.S. title from Roddy Piper.

As might be expected, Piper claims the referee gave the match to McDaniel. "There's no way the referee wasn't favoring McDaniel," Piper swears, "but that won't help that overgrown baboon next time!"

McDaniel was too happy to care about anything anyone said. "The fans have a champion they can trust," McDaniel said.



Wahoo McDaniel stuns Roddy Piper with a tomahawk chop en route to his U.S. title victory.

Backlund and Muraco Battle To Stunning Draw

BY CRAIG PETERS

NEW YORK, NY—In what will surely go down in wrestling history as one of the great confrontations of all time, Bob Backlund and Magnificent Muraco battled to a one-hour



Bob Backlund and Magnificent Muraco wrestled to a thrilling one-hour draw.

time limit draw. Backlund, who put his WWF title on the line for the match, retained his championship.

Spectators agreed that it was only fitting that neither man should win this extraordinary match. The two men used their entire arsenals in displaying all their incredible skills. Spectators were almost as exhausted as the warriors after the unbelievable encounter.

Afterwards, Muraco claimed the timekeeper knew Backlund was losing and gave him a fast count. "Another five minutes," Muraco claimed, "and the title would've been mine."

Hulk Hogan Cheered By AWA Fans

BY PETER KING

MINNEAPOLIS, MN—One of the most hated men in wrestling, Hulk Hogan, has been winning cheers when he appears in AWA matches.

"The fans here are smarter than anywhere else in the world," contends Hogan. "They know I'm the best and react accordingly. It's about time I was recognized by fans as great."

The fans also realize Hogan has been wrestling rulebreakers due to a scheduling situation. Hogan doesn't care whom he wrestles, as long as he gets someone to injure.



Hulk Hogan, despised throughout the East, is a favorite in the Midwest.

AROUND THE GLOBE

NEW ORLEANS, LA

Ernie Ladd, current manager of the Louisiana tag team champions, The Samoans, says that he will not let them wrestle in this area any more unless their purses increase by 50 percent minimum. Ladd sites that he is sick of the way promoters "use" his men.

ATLANTA, GA

Bruno Sammartino Jr. reacted with surprise at the announcement of his father's retirement. The young Sammartino told everyone, however, that he vows to keep on in the tradition of the Sammartino legend by winning a major title within the next year.

RICHMOND, VA

United States champion Wahoo McDaniel says that he will wrestle former champion Roddy Piper anytime, anyplace, anywhere. Wahoo says he is "sick of Piper's accusations" that the Indian star refuses to give him a rematch.

ST. PAUL, MN

Hulk Hogan is at war with Crusher Blackwell, and the fans have gone in support of Hogan for the first time in his career. Hulk says that it feels good to have the fans behind him, but he will not change his wrestling style, regardless of the fans or his opponent.

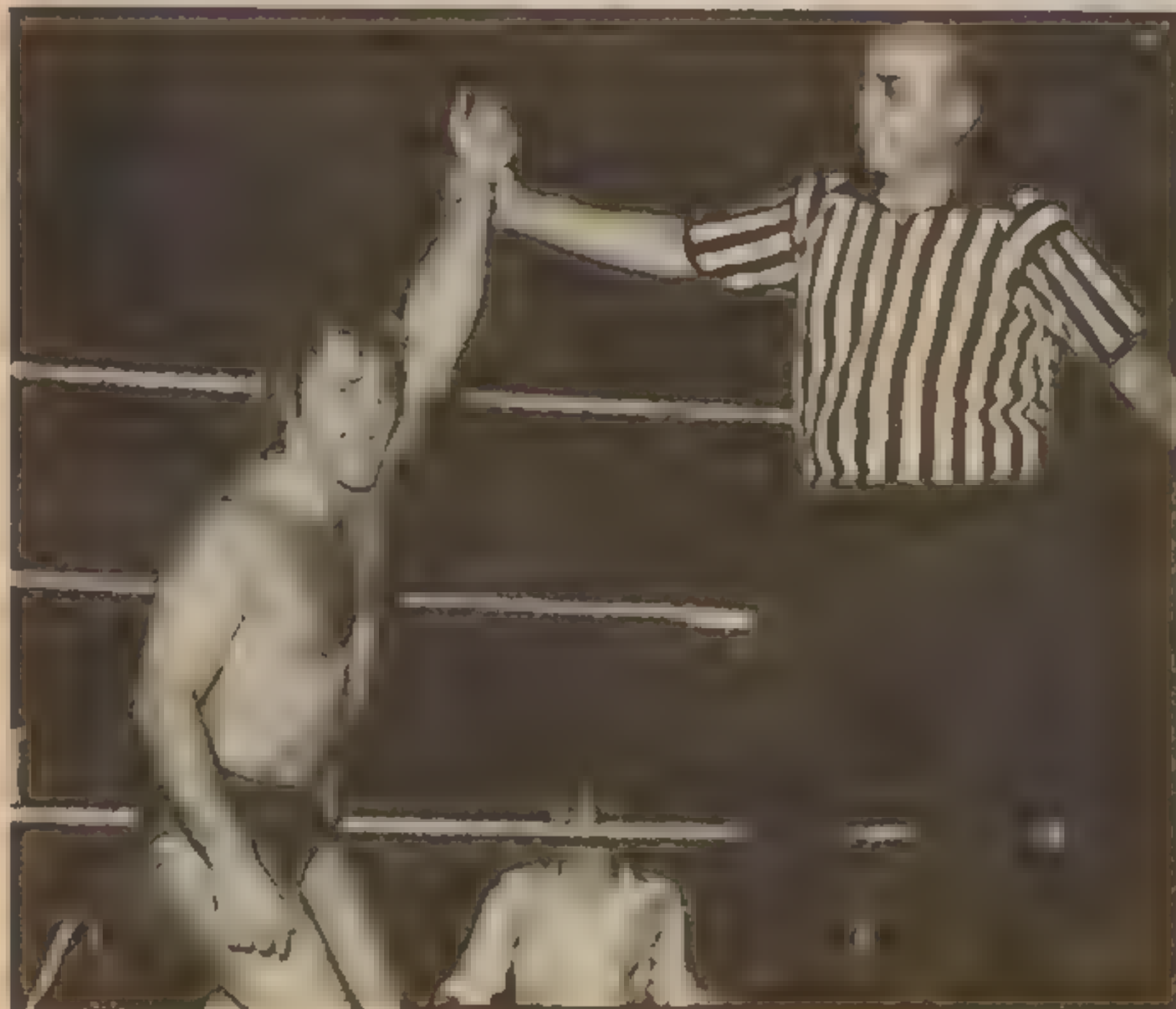
NEW YORK, NY

Fans are still talking about the cruel way Andre the Giant whipped Killer Khan. Most fans questioned did not think Andre was the kind of man who would savage an opponent. Khan needed three weeks to recover from the beating.

Every month, three reporters from **PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED** will participate in an incisive press conference with a top wrestling star. The questions will be demanding. And the answers will reveal the innermost thoughts of the giants of the sport

PRESS CONFERENCE

LARRY ZBYSZKO



(A true superstar in the world of wrestling, Larry Zbyszko not too long ago disappeared from the view of fans all around the world. Recently, however, he has decided to come out of a short self-imposed "retirement" in order to wrestle once again. In this interview, conducted by Editor-in-Chief Peter King and Associate Editors Steve Farhood and Craig Peters, Zbyszko talks about why he's been away from wrestling for so long, and what his plans are now that he's returned.)

PETER KING: It's good to have you here at "Press Conference," Larry, how've you been?

"When I go into the ring eventually against Backlund, I'm going to be prepared. I'm going to be so prepared, that squeaky-clean chump won't even know what hit him."



LARRY ZBYSZKO: Thanks. Peter, it's great to be here. I've been real well. You know, it's good for you to take a break every once in a while; that's what I've been doing these recent months, just taking it easy.

STEVE FARHOOD: Is it true that you've been spending these last months in intensive training preparing for your eventual return to the ring?

ZBYSZKO: Well, let me just say that yes, I am going to be returning to professional wrestling once again, and that yes, I have been doing a little bit of physical training and preparation recently, but nothing you could call "intensive."



Lou Albano, Grand Wizard, and Fred Blassie have all made bids to be Zbyszko's manager. Despite his vast respect for those three gentlemen, however, Larry has decided to go it alone

"I've retired Sammartino, I'll retire Backlund . . . It will set an example for any of those other bozos who think they can step into the ring with me and push me around."



CRAIG PETERS: But we've talked to people who say that you are working on special maneuvers designed particularly to capitalize on the weaknesses in Bob Backlund's style. Is that true?

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ZBYSZKO: Look, if you were going to make a play for the championship, you would go into that ring with assurance that you were not going to lose, am I right? When I go into that ring eventually against

Backlund, I'm going to be prepared. I'm going to be so prepared, that squeaky-clean chump won't even know what hit him.

KING: You sound awfully determined to take away that belt of his.

ZBYSZKO: You better believe it. Listen, buddy, I've retired that spaghetti-bender Sammartino, I'll retire Backlund. He'll be the youngest "champion" ever to retire from professional wrestling. It will set an example for any of these other bozos who think that they can step into the ring with me and push me around. The fact is, they step into the ring with me, they'd better be ready to get abused themselves.

PETERS: You say you retired Sammartino? Seems to me that he still gets into the ring from time to time.

ZBYSZKO: Yeah, he calls it semi-retirement. I call it cowardice. Just look at the record, it shows that he always seems to go into hiding when I'm around. He's running scared, that's all. He is outright afraid of what might happen to him if he stays. If you ask me, it is a smart move. He is long past his prime . . . and even in his prime he was no good. So how do you expect a decrepit old man like that to be able to hold his own in the ring? The answer is simple: he can't. I managed to destroy that old man down to the point where he has no other choice than to run from me.

FARHOOD: What about Bruno Jr.?

ZBYSZKO: Same as his old man.

FARHOOD: I don't understand.

(Continued on page 53)

WHAT THEY ARE SAYING

Every month, our reporters will compile wrestlers' most revealing quotes. Often catching the grapplers with their guards down, our reporters will work endlessly in obtaining interesting quotes on a variety of subjects

JERRY LAWLER

"The reason I don't wrestle all over the place is that most officials are afraid of me. They know I'm my own man and they don't like that. They'd much rather have some guy who takes orders all the time. I only take orders from myself. I guess I'd be more famous if I'd be willing to compromise, but what fun would that be?"



MIKE GRAHAM

"I'm still a few years away from being as good as I can be. Every so often, I'd say about one match in 10, I can feel I'm at my best. When I can feel that way 10 out of 10 matches, then I'll know I've arrived. My father says the most anyone can hope to achieve is to be at your best five out of 10 matches. He's probably right, but that doesn't mean I won't keep trying to be perfect."



SIR OLIVER HUMPERDINK

"I have no use for anyone who calls himself a scientific wrestler. Anyone who claims that title is a disgrace to the sport. I intend that my army will drive them out of the sport. I'm not just talking about Florida, I'm not just talking about the United States, I'm talking about the entire world. When I get through, Steve Keirn won't be able to get a preliminary match in Pango-Pango."



NICK BOCKWINKEL

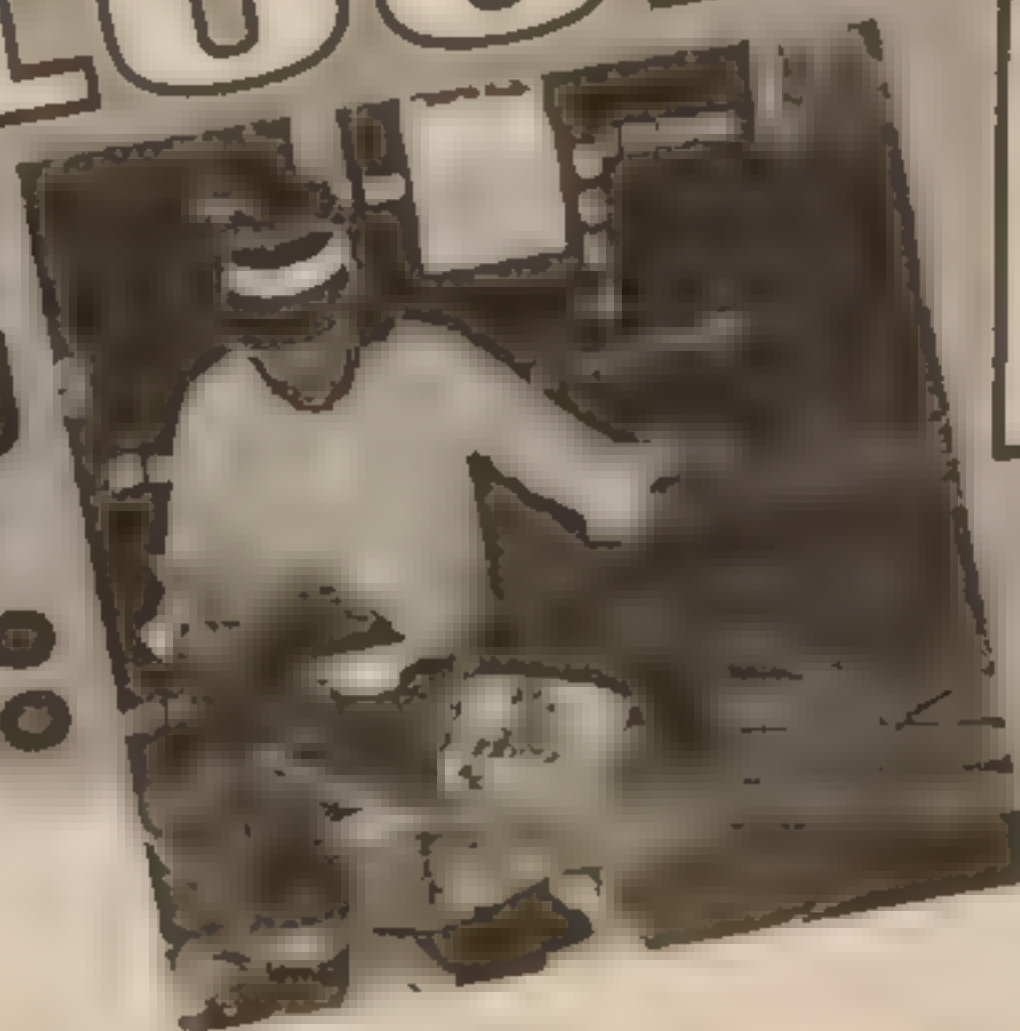
"Look, I deserved to be the guy chosen to be champ when Gagne retired. Still, if I had my way, I'd rather have won it in a tournament. I know there's this cloud over my title, people saying I don't deserve it. Now I have to wrestle to prove myself. Prove myself to these moron fans! Can you imagine anything more ridiculous?"



(Continued on page 49)

LOOKING AT...

Matt Brock:



HAVE YOU EVER been caught up in one of those ruts? Yeah, you know what I'm talking about. It's like every day lasts a week and each week is the same as the one before it. No weekends in between, either, to break up the monotony.

The worst thing about being caught in a rut is the boredom. Tedious, repetitive, sleep-like boredom. You just can't pull anything together because you wind up feeling that there's nothing to pull at... and even if you did, it wouldn't make any difference.

You know what I'm talking about, right? It's emptiness, it's absurdity, it's complete lack of substance. It's downright awful to behold, and makes you wish that you could be anywhere other than where you are; doing anything other than that which you are doing.

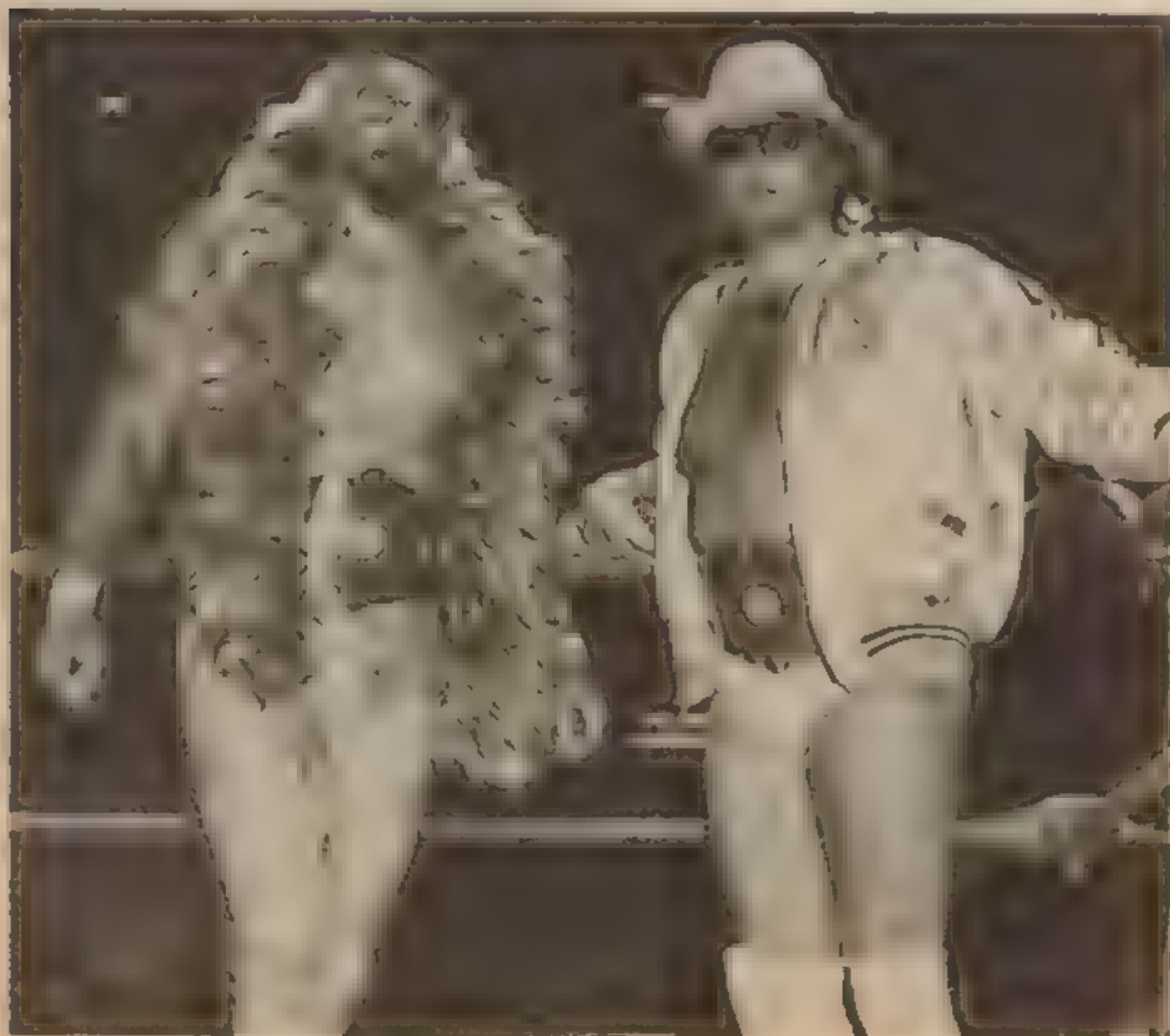
Jesse Ventura bores me

Jesse Ventura makes me feel that I'm getting caught in a rut.

Jesse Ventura makes me wish that I were anywhere right now doing anything else... anything other than writing about another blond self-proclaimed Aryan demigod who thinks he's the greatest gift to women since Rudolph Valentino

Okay, so I'm not a woman and my opinion isn't worth a plugged nickel. But Rosalita is one of the biggest wrestling fans I know, and Jesse Ventura bores her, too. So you see, my master intuition spawned over decades of gumshoeing all across the nation following this sport hasn't steered me wrong yet. This time is no exception.

It's just what the AWA needs, too: a maniacally egocentric macho man dedicated to prettying



Jesse Ventura and Adrian Adonis, former AWA tag team champions.

JESSE VENTURA



up the image that looks back at him from the mirror in the morning rather than developing any sort of scientific style within the ring. The AWA doesn't need that, the fans don't need that, and I sure don't need that. Particularly early on a Monday morning before I've had my second cup of coffee

Have you ever seen this guy when he tag teams with Adrian Adonis? Boy, talk about double indemnity. Those two go together

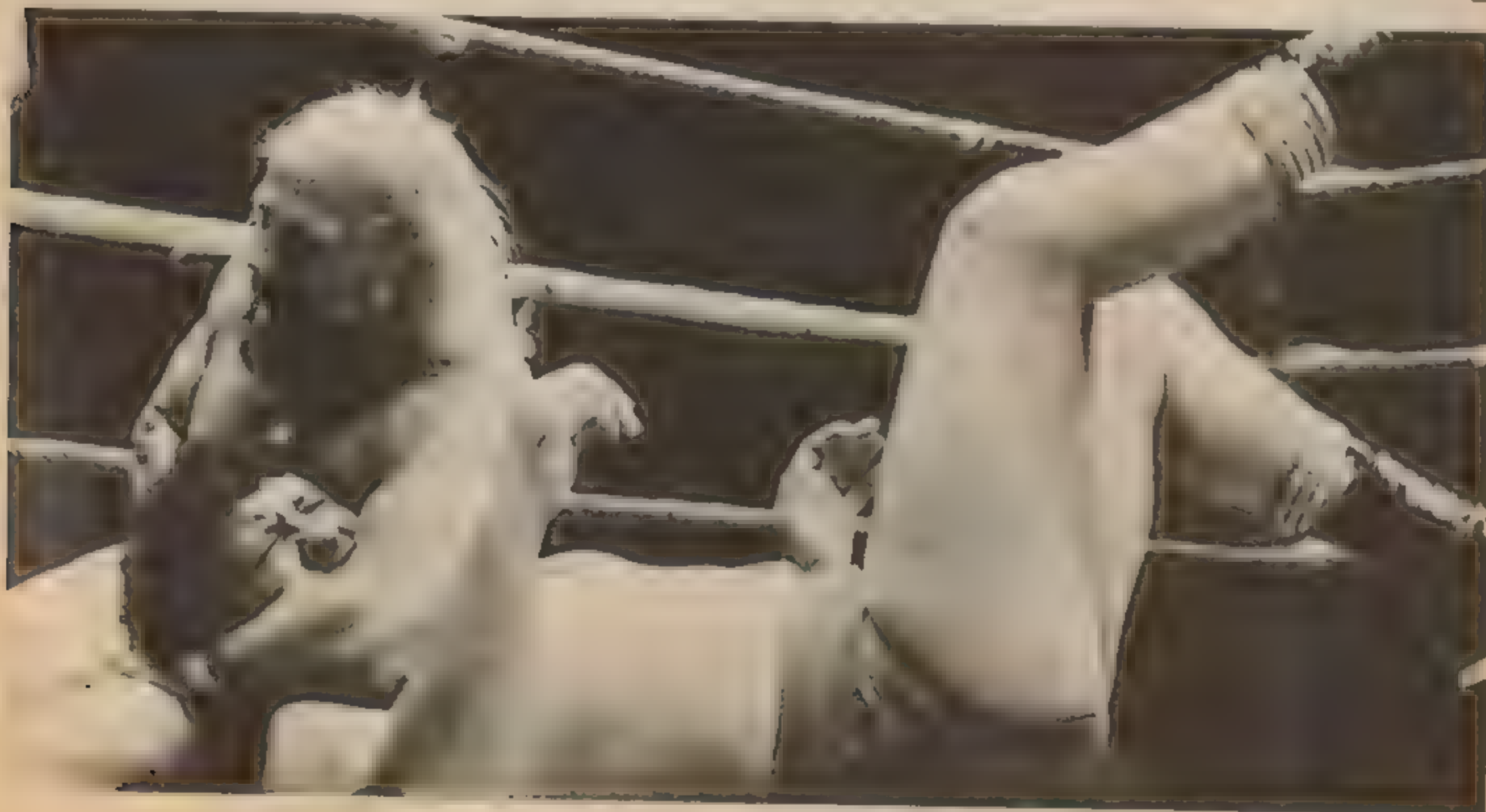
like "up" and "chuck." Subtlety, you say? Hell, no. I make no bones about it: I just can't stomach this guy.

I suspect Greg Gagne' and Jim Brunzell feel the same way. In fact, I wish either of these wrestlers would finish off Ventura in one fell swoop and get him out of the sport, not to mention my crawl, forever

But they don't, and the reason is clear: this clown Ventura is a pretty brutal customer. He may bore me

with his pretty-boy posing and his wild, mindless brawling, but I've got to admit he's been successful.

BAH! I'm totally disgusted. I'm going to pour myself another cup of java, grab a roll, and when I come back to this typewriter start all over again from scratch. I can do that, because this is what is known in the trades as the bottom of the page. That means it's time for me to type "see you next issue." I did. And I will. □



Ventura applies a headlock on Bill Robinson

Ric Flair's Painful Choice:
HIS FANS OR
DUSTY'S TITLE
He Can't Have Both!

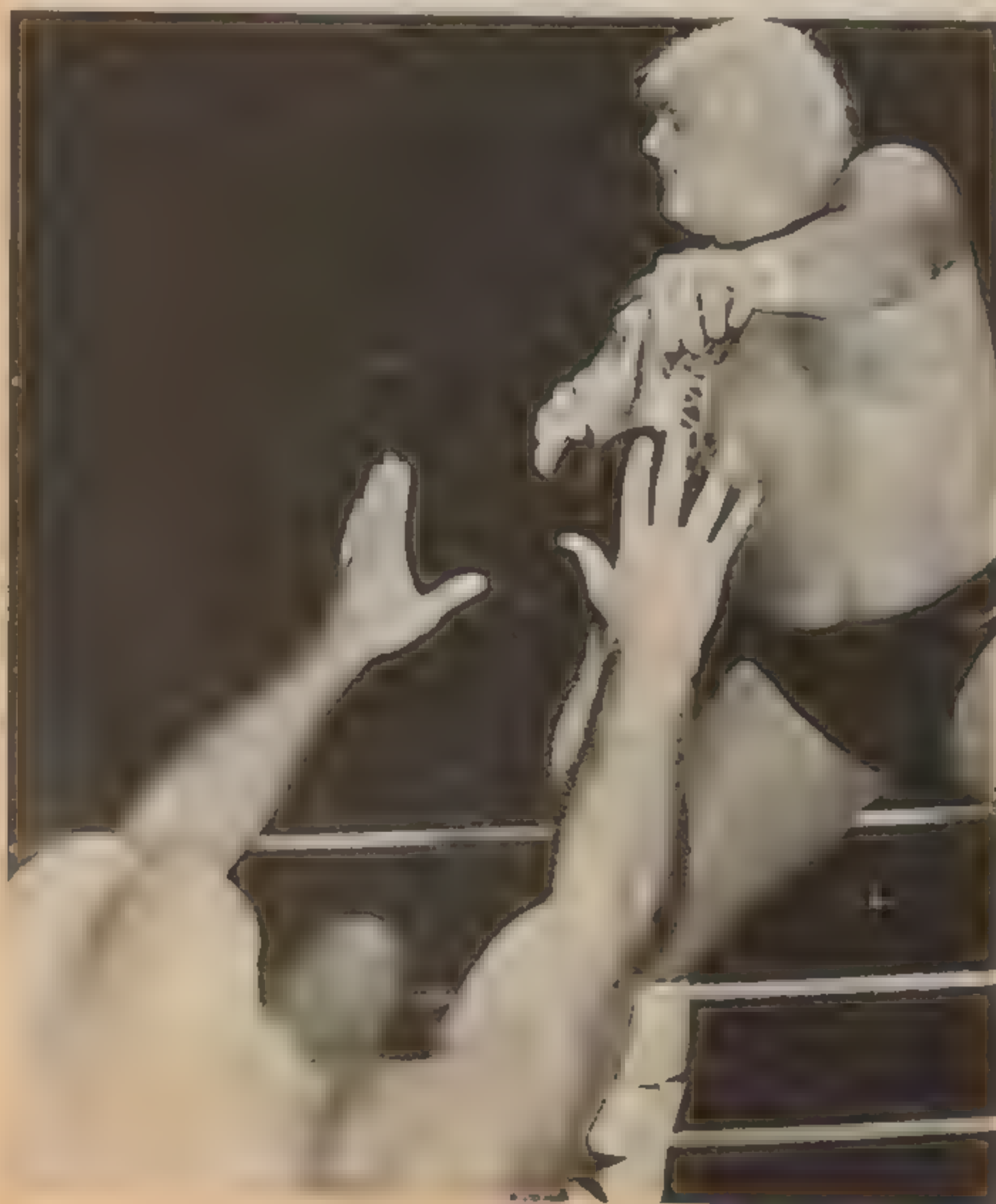
PHOTOS BY BILL APTEE



Ric Flair stands at the crossroads of his career. He must make a choice that will affect the way he wrestles for the rest of his life. He must choose between devoting his life to pursuit of the title, or in dedication to his fans. He wants both, but must give up one



As a veteran wrestler, Ric Flair knows exactly what he has to do to take Dusty Rhodes' NWA title. He feels, though, that the aggressive tactics he needs to employ will turn off his fans. Holding Rhodes in a legscissors, Flair yanks back on the champion's head (above). Dusty prepares a counter-attack (below).



RIC FLAIR'S TERRITORY is Mid-Atlantic. In that area, he reigns supreme. Forget the fact that he isn't the NWA champ . . . as far as these people are concerned, there is no such animal as a Dusty Rhodes. The only wrestler who matters is Ric Flair.

"Nature Boy is terrific!" declares Fred Vornle, a fan who lives just outside of Roanoke, Virginia. "He doesn't even have to wrestle Rhodes. As far as I'm concerned, Flair is the champion already. In fact, it would probably be an insult to his integrity and his wrestling career to even step into the ring with that whale in the first place."

Vornle's attitude is typical of the kind of fervent, almost fanatical support that Flair commands. While having fans this loyal may on the surface be the ideal situation for any wrestler, it has caused Ric Flair to face a terribly difficult decision.

"I'm really stuck about what to do," says Flair. "I really enjoy the support of the fans, I like to have them behind me all the time.



They react to my style in the ring very well. But when you face a man like Rhodes, there are certain things that you have to do in the ring that you normally wouldn't do under other circumstances.

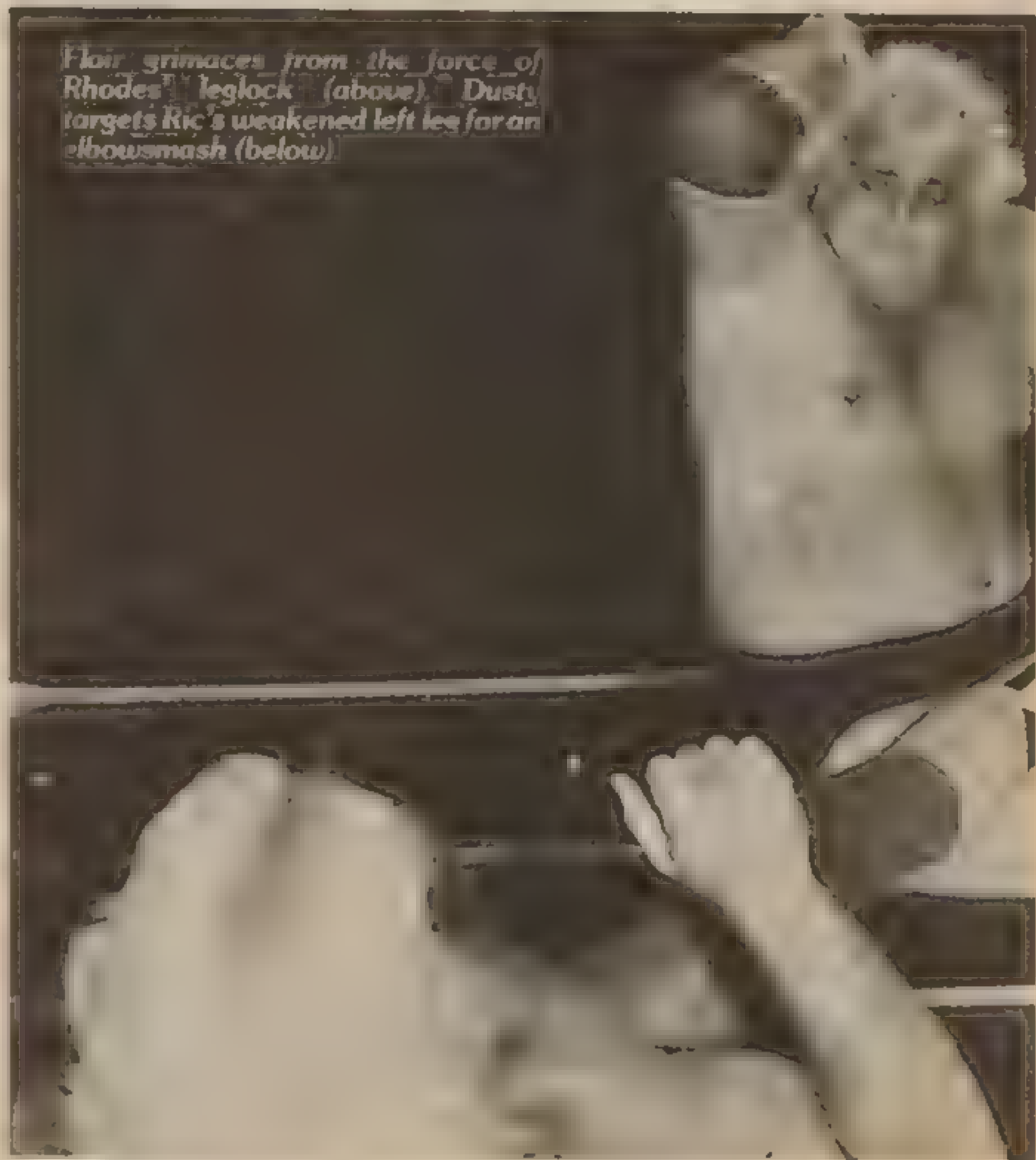
"What I'm afraid of is that the fans wouldn't support me if I had to make the changes I feel are necessary if I am to wrestle Rhodes in the manner I see fit. I mean, judging from the mail I get, a lot of them don't even care to see me wrestle Rhodes in the first place."

In a recent match with Rhodes, however, Flair was able to bypass a lot of the objections of his fans simply by going out of his own territory and into St. Louis.

"That St. Louis match was great," said Flair. "I was comfortable, I was confident, and best of all, I didn't have the pressure on me to please my fans. I was out of my territory, you might say, and I had total freedom to wrestle the way I wanted. I had nobody to please but myself."

In St. Louis, Flair almost pleased himself to the greatest extent possible: He nearly defeated Rhodes for the title.

Flair grimaces from the force of Rhodes' leglock (above). Dusty targets Ric's weakened left leg for an elbowsmash (below).



Dusty himself was unavailable for comment, but a spokesman denied that Flair was ever close to winning the title. In any event, reporters from *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* observed that,

indeed, Flair had come very close to ousting Rhodes from the top spot.

"Yeah, I sure did come close," howled Flair, breaking into a
(Continued on page 62)



THE VON ERICHS: HARLEY RACE'S ROADBLOCK TO THE NWA TITLE

Harley Race continues his determined drive for an unprecedented seventh claim to the NWA belt. Three brothers are equally determined to prevent his success in achieving a possible title match. It's three against one, but Race is only beginning to fight

PHOTOS BY BILL APTER

AS HARLEY RACE continues to redevelop his own wrestling style and mannerisms to the point where he may again come into contention for the NWA title, he continues to come up against barriers preventing him from getting there as soon as he

would like.

Make no mistake about it: Race would like to get there. He is determined to become the wrestler who stands alone in the record books: an unprecedented seventh heavyweight championship. Presently, Race is tied with

Lou Thesz, both having held the NWA championship six times. One more claim to the belt would catapult Race into wrestling immortality.

"Of course, that's precisely the reason I'm working myself the way I am," explained Race. "I know



His destination is clear. Harley Race wants nothing more out of life than to stand alone in the record books as the only seven-time NWA champion. He knows, however, that he must cross through a triple barrier set up by the Von Erich brothers before he can reach that destination. And David (above and left) presents Harley with quite a challenge.



about the record books. I'm well aware of the fact that I'm now tied with Thesz, and I know that if I can stand alone in the books, rather than being lumped with someone else, I can finally prove to the world that I am indeed the best of the best, a man to be reckoned with, a wrestler to command the respect of everyone for all time."

The crux of Race's plan to reclaim the title involves a realignment of his wrestling style and a restructuring of his entire method of operations.

"Too many people know what to expect from me," said Race. "By starting from scratch, by creating what is in effect a brand new wrestling style, I will be able to

wrench the title away, from whoever the unfortunate slob is who happens to hold it by the time I get there. I hope it's Rhodes, because I have some particular presents for him once I get around to meeting that blimp again."

Unfortunately for Race, the time when he will be wrestling for the title is getting to be further and further away. A family triumvirate stands in his way, and the way things look now, it will be some time before Race is able to overcome their challenge.

Kerry, Kevin, and David Von Erich: Harley Race's three hurdles that seem to get higher and higher with each match

In a recent match in St. Louis, Race went up against David Von Erich. For a good part of the match, things stood just about



Race is warned by the referee, but nothing or no one is going to prevent him from leaping Von Erich from the top turnbuckle. Just as, in his mind, nothing or no one is going to stop him from reclaiming the NWA belt.

even. But that's not good enough for Race, not good enough at all.

"What I would like to be able to do," explained Race, "is to just brush these three guys aside like so much tissue paper. It's getting to be ridiculous, though. When I met David in St. Louis, I found that

he was a lot stronger than I anticipated. He also has a lot more stamina and endurance in the ring than I bargained for."


Regardless, Race continues to face the Von Erich brothers.

"This is the goal I have set for myself," Race said. "I can't move

along to the next step of my plan until I take care of the Von Erichs. Once I'm rid of these guys, the rest will be easy. For now, though, I have to wrestle them, I have to keep concentrating on them until I am victorious. It's a major step

(Continued on page 57)

Tony Atlas' Fear:



**"I DON'T
THINK
THE FANS
WILL
FORGIVE
ME"**

WALKING THROUGH THE dark, lengthy hallway one can easily detect the pungent aroma of sweat mixed with medicated talcum. A bright light at the end of the hallway offered assurance that there was life somewhere within these bleak, white brick walls.

As one moves closer to the light, the familiar chink-chink of metal against metal confessed the fact that, indeed, someone was in the gym and working hard. A little closer, and faint grunts, groans, and gasps for air punctuate the sounds of the universal weight machine.

Walk through the doorway and observe determination at work: determination to stretch the body's physical

capabilities to their ultimate limit . . . and then beyond in an attempt to extend those very limits that much further.

Walk through the doorway and observe Tony Atlas at work.

Sweat pouring down his brow, Atlas rose from the bench press, threw a towel around his neck, and spoke about his recent sabbatical from wrestling . . . and his recent return.

"I needed some time off for myself," explained Atlas, "so I took three months and stayed away from wrestling altogether. I decided to devote my time to bodybuilding instead."

Bodybuilding is a lonely pursuit, but it is precisely

this quality of isolation that attracted Atlas to it in the first place.

"The idea of taking three months off was to spend some time alone and think about things, think about what I want to do with my life and with athletics," Atlas said. "I've spent a lot of time all through my life with weight training in all forms. In fact, before turning to professional wrestling, there was a stretch of time where I concentrated only on bodybuilding as a sport.

"So when I'm in the gym," continued Atlas, "I'm very much at home. I like bench pressing a lot, and other than that a lot of general weight training is what I spend most

(Continued on page 58)

Atlas left wrestling for a short period of time to devote himself to weightlifting. Harley Race plays the part of Tony's barbell (below). Atlas clamps his powerful arms around Mongolian Stomper's head (right).



Gripped by a determination to escape the agonizingly demanding world of professional wrestling, Tony Atlas took a three-month break in the middle of some of the most heated action ever seen in this sport. Now he is gripped by a fear easily as agonizing: will the fans forgive his abandonment of them during this trying time?

HULK HOGAN: "THAT TROPHY BELONGS TO ME!"



TOKYO, JAPAN, WAS the site recently of a ridiculously absurd situation culminating in total embarrassment for Hulk Hogan.

The centerpiece of the entire affair was the highly prized International Trophy, an award given each year by the Japanese wrestling officials to the American wrestler of the year.

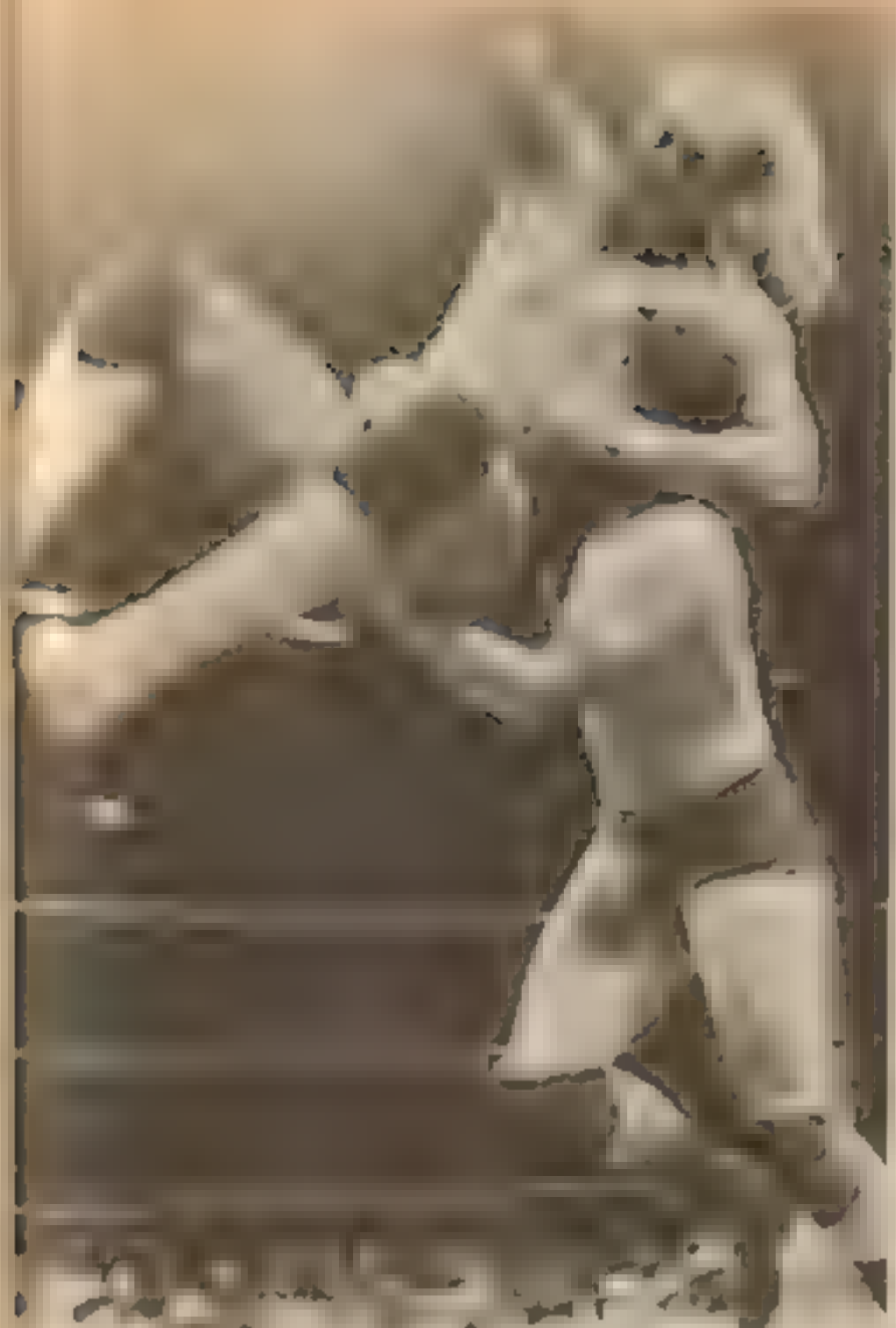
News of the award was widely circulated, but it was not announced who the winner was. That was to be learned only on the evening of the award presentation, a ceremony which would involve dozens of professional wrestlers, as well as an additional hundred or so officials, Japanese dignitaries, and prominent fans.

Pro Wrestling Illustrated, through the services of certain unnamed but highly paid sources, has learned of an astonishing plot to rig the awards ceremony . . . a plot which was ultimately unsuccessful.

Prior to the presentation of the award itself, the trophy was locked in a glass case in the office of a highly ranked Japanese wrestling official.

Two days before the presentation was to be made, an agent of

Halfway around the world, the coveted International Trophy was to be awarded. Both Hulk Hogan and Bob Backlund were present in Tokyo, Japan, that evening for the culmination of what we discovered was a tantalizingly confused series of cloak and dagger double-crosses which eventually ended up in embarrassment for Hogan



The action in the ring was fast and furious, but not nearly as fast and furious as the action leading up to the confrontation. The International Trophy, emblematic of the top U.S. wrestler in Japan, was the center of one of the greatest wrestling controversies in the history of the Land of the Rising Sun.

Hulk Hogan allegedly worked his way into the official's office, jimmying open the case and withdrawing the trophy. This alleged break-in took place on Friday night. The awards ceremony was scheduled for Sunday night.

The award was then taken to an engraver to have Hulk Hogan's name engraved on the award. As our informant told the story, only the official in whose office the award was kept knew of the true identity of the winner of the trophy. It was to be his task to have the award engraved on Saturday afternoon.

After the award was engraved, it was returned to the case where it had been kept.

As Saturday morning rolled around, the official hadn't shown up to his office to pick up the

(Continued on page 66)

PHOTOS BY
EDDIE CHESLOTT



Ivan Koloff's grip on Rick Steamboat's head is as firm as his grip on the Mid-Atlantic title he so cherishes. Anybody who wrestles for that title must expect the Russian Bear's full wrath.

"I THINK THAT Ivan Koloff is the cruelest man in wrestling today."

These are the words of wrestling's living legend himself, Bruno Sammartino, only three short months ago in the very pages of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*.

Now, a mere 90 days later, these words ring as true as ever... perhaps more so. As Mid-Atlantic heavyweight champion, Ivan Koloff maintains a stranglehold on that region that no wrestler has been able to even weaken, much less break. This is not to say that many haven't tried.

Most recently, Rick Steamboat attempted to crack the Koloff dynasty, and he learned the hard way that this angry Russian protects his territory and his belt with a spirited vengeance.

"It's amazing," said Steamboat, "but Koloff is probably one of the most brutal men in the ring I've ever had the grave misfortune of wrestling. He's not bad for the most part, but he tends to overdo things, he is more violent than is necessary in all cases. I can't respect a man for that."

A former WWF champion, Koloff is notorious for his cruelty in the ring. Dusty Rhodes

IVAN KOLOFF'S DEATH-GRIP ON THE MID-ATLANTIC TITLE

Ivan Koloff, the mighty Russian champion, holder of the Mid-Atlantic heavyweight championship belt, has created a barrier between his title and all challengers that seems impossible to break through. Many have tried, all have failed, and the Koloff dynasty continues to reign supreme.



Koloff's clashes with Hussein Arab (above left) were bloody wars of attrition. Koloff is into chains, or anything else that will help him defend his title (above right). Ivan launches a brutal attack from the ring apron (left). Steamboat would not be able to maintain his bearhug against the Bear (below).

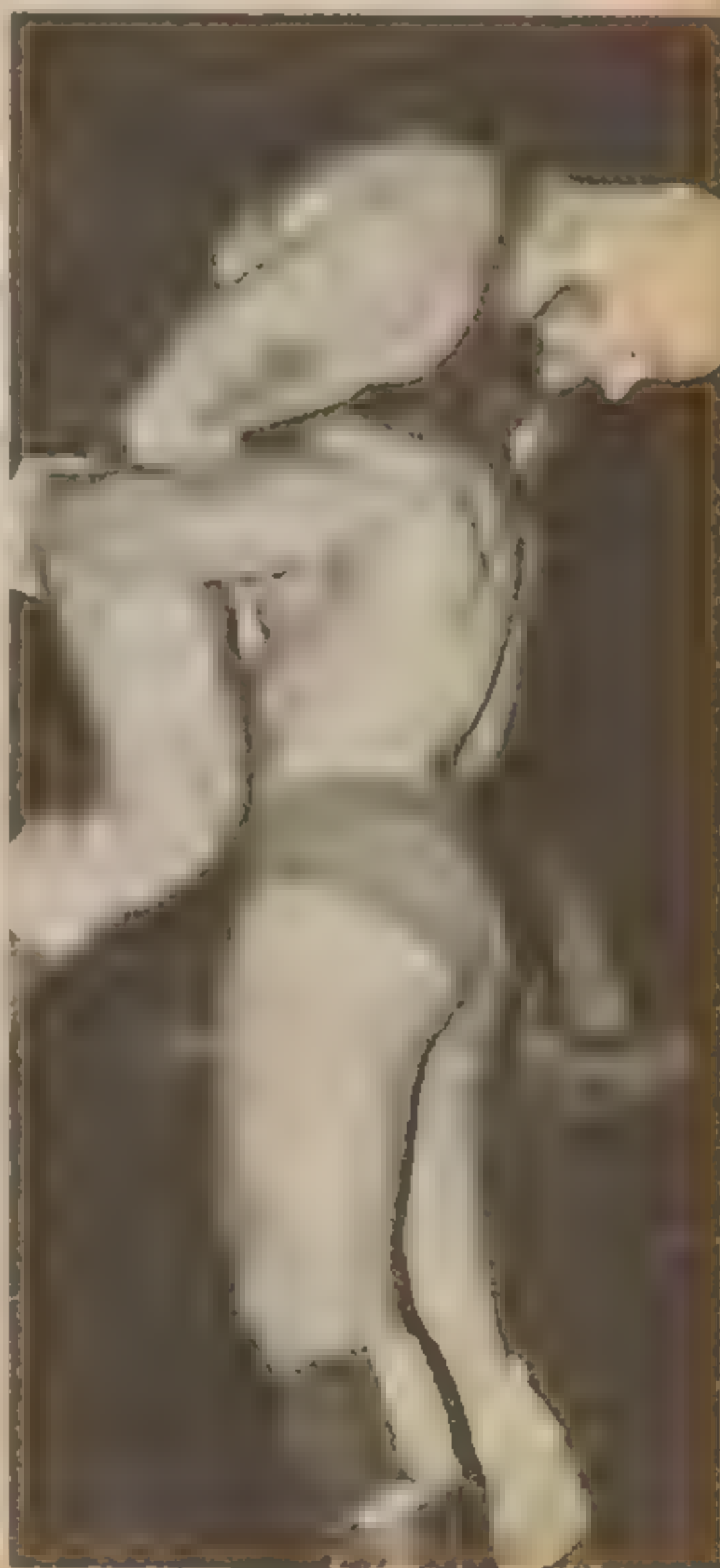


witnessed a match between Koloff and Hussein Arab

"When I saw that madman go up against Hussein," said the American Dream, "I knew that there was going to be fireworks. There was, sure as Texas is big. Granted, if anyone deserved to be abused by a lunatic like Koloff it was Arab, and I was sure glad to see that happen, but even I was wincing at times during that match. I've been in the ring against Koloff, and it's true, he is one mean man."

No one really seems to know why Ivan Koloff is so angry when he wrestles. Perhaps he is venting anger against something else in his life when he wrestles, though this is only speculation. Ask Koloff about it, and he'll tell you nothing . . . only that he is viciously single-minded in his defenses of the Mid-Atlantic title.

"No one beat me for Mid-Atlantic heavyweight championship," says Koloff, a thick Russian accent flowing over every syllable. "I face Wahoo McDaniel in the ring, I go up against crazy Hussein Arab, I even face wrestlers you people



call your best. People like Rick Steamboat, Dusty Rhodes, and Ric Flair.

"I wrestle all these people," continued Ivan, "and nobody here give me credit. Nobody here write about me the way I deserve, that I am great wrestler,

that I have been in ring with these so-called superstars. No. What do they write instead? They say things like I am crazy, that I am angry, that I am too mean for these people.

"Well, maybe I am too mean," the Russian speculated. "You

know, here in America, these people have weak stomach. They do not understand what it takes to be great wrestler. They do not understand that this is violent sport, that pain and hurt are part of this violent sport. Some American wrestling fans think wrestlers should dance around in ring and never show off their strength. I say that is wrong.

"Also I think that maybe some American wrestlers are afraid of me, run a little scared, and also have weak stomach themselves," said Koloff. "Maybe some of them not so sure that they are strong enough to climb into ring with me, afraid they not look so good in front of all their precious fans. I say nyet to all that. When I wrestle it's me against the other wrestler. Forget about fans, forget about trying to look good. Only try to win match, that's all I worry about when I am in the ring. That is why

(Continued on page 63)



Koloff is one of the few men in wrestling whose legs are powerful enough to escape Steamboat's figure-four leglock (above). Koloff's massive arms hide the fact that he is applying an illegal chokehold (below left). The Russian's devastating elbowsmash turns Steamboat horizontal in mid-air (below right).



WHAT THEY ARE SAYING

(Continued from Page 29)

DINO BRAVO

"I know when I retire it will be because my body can't take it anymore. It's a fact I accept. There will come a time when walking is painful, half the joints in my body will be made of plastic, and my muscles will be torn to shreds. Hell, the human body wasn't meant to take the kind of punishment it gets in wrestling. Yeah, I'm literally sacrificing myself to this sport."



TONY GAREA

"A friend of mine, who isn't a wrestler, says I should stop being such a nice guy. The money and fame seems to be going to the grapplers who cheat and cripple. Maybe he's right about the last part. And there's more to this sport than money. When I'm winning by wrestling scientifically, that's a thrill better than any amount of money."



DORY FUNK JR.

"I once made it my business to do what the fans wanted. I felt a responsibility to them and the sport. I don't feel anything anymore except that I have to look out for myself. I'm willing to do anything to succeed. I know that upsets people, but that's tough. I'm the one awake at four in the morning because pain is shooting through my body. When they start sharing the pain, I'll start worrying about the fans."



JOHN STUDD

"I'm a hero. People all over the world adore me. When I walk down the street, grown men quake and women shiver. I like being famous. It makes life easier. That's why I want to be champion. People adore a champion. I'm gonna be an idol to millions!"



ON ASSIGNMENT

(Continued from Page 18)



A match between NWA champion Dusty Rhodes and Mil Mascaras would be a tough match to handicap, says Huey. They both have a tremendous amount of worldwide appeal.

New York City or the Scope in Virginia, he sets the official odds on the matches. Then he makes five phone calls—one to the Northeast, one to the South, one to the West Coast, and one to the Midwest—and within 24 hours every bookie in the country has the information. Millions of dollars are bet on professional wrestling every year, and Huey is the man who makes the wheels go around.

"I'm the only one the bookies trust for two reasons," said Huey, who speaks with a gravelly voice. "First, I'm the best in the world at what I do. There may be three champions in wrestling, but I'm the undisputed champion of

handicapping. I've been doing it for 30 years, and I've seen the competition come and go. Because I'm good, there isn't any competition any more. When the bookies want a line, they wait for my odds.

"The second thing, and it's the most important thing, is that the bookies know I'm 100 percent on the level. No deals, no double-crosses. I can't be bought. With the money I make in a year, there isn't a wrestler or manager in the sport who could afford me anyway. But don't think they haven't tried."

But then why the dubious nickname "Backdoor"?

"Let's let bygones be bygones," said Huey with a

wink.

"Okay," I said to Huey. "You can make odds on matches that actually take place. But let me hear your line on some dream matches the fans really want to see. How about Backlund-Bockwinkel?"

"Remember," Huey responded, "I make the line that will draw half the bets to one side and half to the other. My opinion on the winner and the wrestlers' talents have nothing to do with the odds. Because Bockwinkel is so popular, especially on the East Coast where there is really big money floating around, I'd make him a 2-1 favorite. But if I had to pick a winner, I'd call it a tossup. Backlund is no Ivy League lock."

"What about Mil Mascaras against Dusty Rhodes?"

"A tossup. Mascaras' appeal is worldwide. The bookies get a lot of action on him from outside the country. But Rhodes is the American Dream. There'd be a lot of major beans bet on both sides. I call the bout pick-em."

And finally, "Andre the giant versus Bruno Sammartino?"

"Wow, a tough one. The sentimental money would be on Bruno, but I'd make Andre the 7-5 chalk."

So there you have it, straight from the expert's mouth. My final question to Huey was an ill-advised attempt at humor.

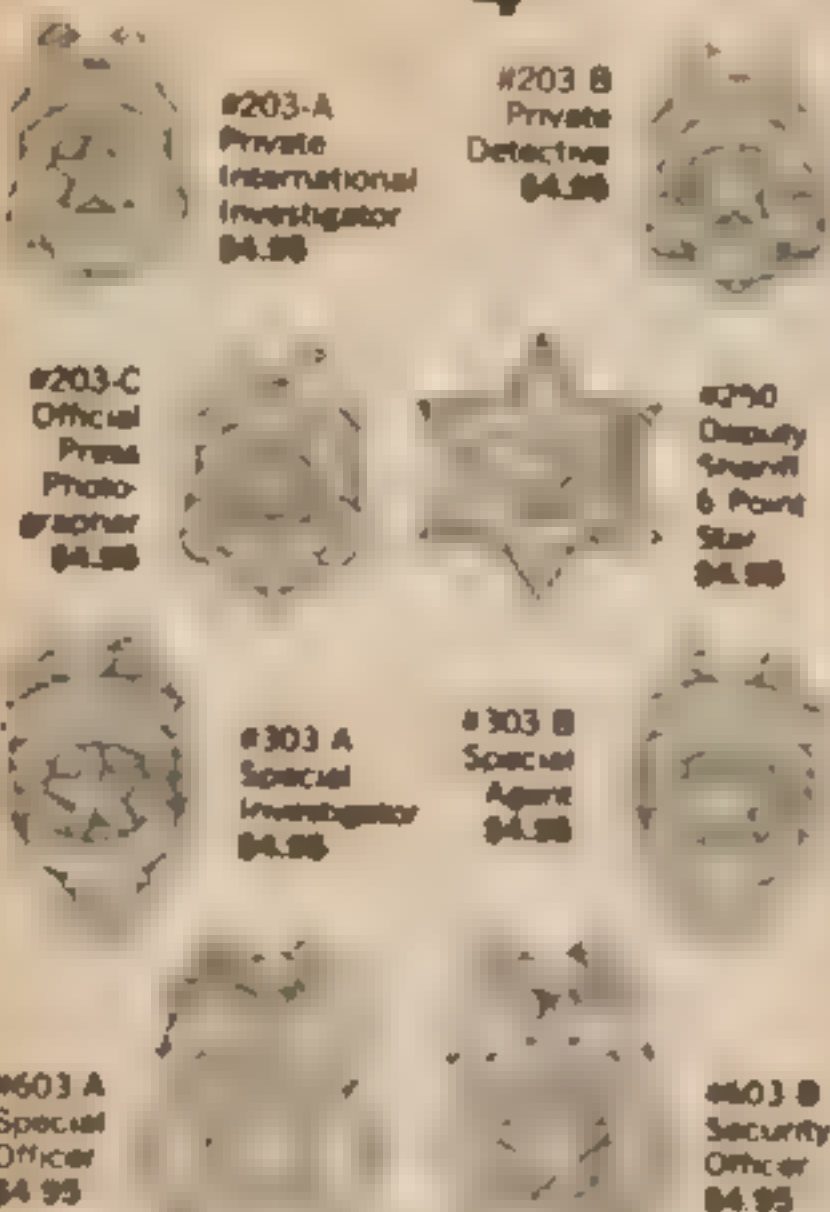
"What are the odds that you keep doing what you're doing without getting caught?"

"I'd say it's 10-1 against," he said. "But if I do, the odds that you end up in the hospital with a broken leg are even better."

Huey winked. I thought I sensed a grin through the mask. I shook his hand and left. A good gambler knows not to play the game too long. □

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KING'S COURT

(Continued from Page 6)

TUESDAY (The Hotel): A bottle of perfectly aged 24-year-old Scotch arrives in the room. The card says it's from "A Friend." I send it back to Heenan.

WEDNESDAY (The Hotel): I'm getting ready to leave for the arena when there's a knock on the door. It's the bellboy and he's carrying a very large, bulging wallet. "I believe you lost this, sir," he says. I knew it wasn't mine because it was the wrong color. Also, I don't carry around \$2,000 in 20s. I told the bellboy it probably belonged to Mr. Heenan.

WEDNESDAY (The Arena): It's one of the biggest matches in years as Bockwinkel is set to battle Dino Bravo. I'm met at the arena door by a uniformed guard. "I'm sorry, Mr. King, but I have orders not to let you in tonight." I sputtered about

freedom of the press and the First Amendment, all to no avail. Finally, I was resigned to my fate. I knew Heenan had bribed this official, but I couldn't figure out why. First Heenan invites me to the AWA, now he gets panicky and bars me from seeing Bockwinkel in what could be his greatest match. Very strange.

THURSDAY (The Hotel): My morning paper provides an answer to yesterday's strange occurrence. The sports section has a big story about the Bockwinkel-Bravo match. According to the paper, Nick attacked Bravo before the bell. Then followed an incredible amount of illegal tactics and cheating by Bockwinkel. He used foreign objects, chokes, outside interference from Heenan, everything but an atomic warhead. Still, Bravo held his own and looked to be on his way to winning the AWA title. But Bockwinkel was counted out of the ring, thereby losing the bout but saving his belt. As I put down my paper, the phone rang. It was Heenan inviting me to lunch, brunch, breakfast, or dinner, my choice. I told him I wasn't hungry. He asked me if I would accompany him and Bockwinkel to Chicago, where Nick was scheduled to defend his belt. I told him I was going home. "But you've only been here a couple of days," Heenan protested. "Surely you don't have enough information to judge Nicholas fairly."

That's where you're wrong, Heenan. I've had more than enough, especially from you. □



Bockwinkel has a unique method for loosening up before a match.

PRESS CONFERENCE

(Continued from Page 28)



Zbyszko, the second man out of the cage, seems to have had enough of Bruno Sammartino. Now that Bruno has retired, Zbyszko has set his sights on Bob Backlund's WWF belt.

ZBYSZKO: I'll cause him to do the same thing as his old man, retire because he physically can't wrestle anymore. Just wait.

KING: Just to change the subject a little, Larry. There's been a lot of speculation as to whether or not you'll be utilizing the services of a manager when you finally do make your return. What's the story there?

ZBYSZKO: Well, Peter, I've thought it over and I've decided for sure that I don't need a manager. I don't need someone telling me what to do, when to do it, and how... I'm my own man in the ring, I'm brilliant, and I'm my own boss. I know myself better than any manager could ever hope to, and I'm confident that I'll be able to guide myself to the point where that belt around Backlund's waist will soon be around mine.

PETERS: There are a lot of obstacles in your way, though.

What about being able to handle wrestlers like Rick Martel or Tony Atlas?

ZBYSZKO: Are you kidding me? Amateurs, rank amateurs compared to me. Martel doesn't know a toehold from a bodyslam, and the only trouble with Atlas might be that if I ever got him into a headlock, it wouldn't matter, it wouldn't have any effect because he's got nothing between his ears anyway.

KING: Well, we're just about out of time here, Larry. Is there anything else you would like to say to the people reading this magazine?

ZBYSZKO: Only that if they're big fans of Backlund, or that wimpy Bruno Jr., they're in for a big disappointment.

KING: Larry Zbyszko, thanks for being here with us on "Press Conference."

ZBYSZKO: My 'pleasure, Peter. ☐

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was supposed to be so spoiled and self-centered, had come out of his way to make me feel a little more comfortable in a strange place. How wrong we can be about people. Bruno Sammartino Jr. has been given a lot by his father. But more important than money, this man has acquired his father's compassion and human kindness.

And if he doesn't learn half of what his father knows in the ring, he already knows enough to be a complete human being, and someone I am proud to call my friend.

THE NEWS OF Bruno Sammartino's announced retirement struck me very hard.


Abruzzi, Italy, to keep the belt away from those devious men. Everything would be all right, as long as Bruno Sammartino was champion.

It's funny, with all this man's great accomplishments—weight-lifting record that still stand today, his thousands of victories, his two WWF title reigns, a career that has spanned four decades—I think I will always best remember the night he lost his belt to Ivan Koloff in 1971.

Nobody expected it. Bruno, after all, had clearly established his superiority over the Russians in several previous matches. But, as Bruno himself later admitted, he had a bad day. Koloff weakened Bruno and pinned him after a kneedrop from the top turnbuckle. Over 20,000 fans sat in stunned disbelief as Bruno lay on the mat, more disappointed with the fact that he let down his fans than actually losing the title.

As he left the ring, the fans stood in unison and applauded.

"That was the highlight of my career," he later said. □



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IN FOCUS

(Continued from Page 12)

EASY DOES IT

I made some mention last issue about being disappointed in the recent performance of Steve O and Ted DiBiase. Well, to expand on that a bit, I've become convinced lately that most of DiBiase's problems are stemming from the fact that he's overextending himself too much. If you heard about how he wrestled twice in one day recently down in Louisiana and Georgia, you know exactly what I'm talking about. There is

no way whatsoever that an athlete can stay in proper shape with that kind of physical abuse. Football players have a week off between games, while top boxers often take months. Can you imagine the New York Giants playing a twinnight doubleheader some Sunday evening? Come on, Ted, give yourself a break . . . lighten up. I don't know why you're doing this to yourself, but it can only mean trouble if you continue

A GIANT TASK

Andre the Giant. His name has become synonymous with the word "revenge" lately, and it's no wonder. Anxious as he was to get back in the ring, he's been even more anxious to pay Killer Khan back for landing him in the hospital in the first place. He's off to a good start, but he had to be pulled off of Khan by three of his peers when he went berserk and nearly killed the Mongolian maniac by choking him. I think

Khan felt humiliated by that fact, and can hardly be seen as pleased at the fact that he wasn't able to hold his own against Andre. I suspect Khan, too, will be looking for his own sort of revenge. When next the two meet, I fear that serious repercussions may result. No predictions yet, just anticipation of total mayhem. I do, however, wish Andre all the luck in the world . . . he'll need it. □



KILLER KHAN

HARLEY RACE

(Continued from Page 41)



Though the Von Erichs presently pose a major problem for Race, he insists he will not let them blow the opportunity to become a seven-time champion

towards my title, and I intend to be successful."

Couldn't Race just sidestep the Von Erichs and wrestle somebody else?

"Well, I suppose I could," he explained, "but I have a very deliberate plan outlined. Like I said, this is a major step in the plan. It is important to the integrity of my seventh title reign that I do it this way. As far as I'm concerned, I'm going to do it properly, or not at all. Right now, this is the way to do it properly."

In the meantime, Harley Race continues to have trouble slipping by the Von Erich brothers. Yet he

perseveres in the face of seemingly unbeatable odds.

"You know, I think I have a handle on my problem with these guys," says Race. "I'm developing my new style bit by bit. I've reached a point now where my new style is clashing with my old because of the level of opponent I am beginning to tackle. It is simply a matter of being able to adapt more quickly to my new set of holds, maneuvers, and counters. Once I do that, things will come a lot easier, and anyone who steps into the ring with me had better watch out."

If nothing else, Harley Race is to be commended for his awesome diligence in the face of huge odds. If anyone is able to overcome the record of Thesz, Race is the man to do it. □

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Tony Atlas

(Continued from Page 43)



The Stomper had little chance of keeping his balance after running into Atlas' muscular shoulder. Tony has no doubts about his ability; his only concern is whether or not the fans are behind him following his short hiatus

of my time with.

"When I'm alone and working out, I find that even though I'm involved in a very difficult, strenuous physical activity, I find that it relaxes me a lot. Then, when I'm relaxed, my mind wanders a bit, the weights themselves become second nature to me, and I find that I

can think about anything and everything that might be bothering me or might happen to enter into my thoughts."

During his three-month respite from wrestling, Atlas spent a lot of time considering where he was going to go in sports.

"For a while, it seemed as if I was going to stay away from wrestling altogether," Atlas recalled. "The way things were going, I thought that I might want to make a change and devote all of my

time to bodybuilding as a full time professional.

"As I thought about it some more, though, I realized that I wouldn't be happy as a full-time bodybuilder at this stage of my life. I decided that for me, the best thing would be a return to professional wrestling. That is ultimately where my interests are at this point in my life, and there are a lot of fans that, when I did take my three months off, I feel I left behind."

A major portion of Atlas' thoughts during his time off were concerned with the fans. What would they think about him abandoning them for a quarter of a year while there was so much going on in wrestling?

"I worried a lot about what the fans would think," said Atlas, "and in a lot of ways that is still my main concern. My biggest fear when I go to bed at night is whether the fans will forgive me or not for having left them like this.

"I hope that when I return, though, that the fans will return to me like they were before. I hope that my speaking with them through this article will help to explain and make clear to them why I did what I did. It was a necessity at the time, and I simply had no other choice but to take some time off.

"Right now, though, I just don't know," concluded Atlas. "There aren't any clear signals coming from the fans. I don't know whether they'll understand or not. I can't tell if they'll forgive me. I hope they do. I hope they understand." □

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Ric Flair

(Continued from Page 34)



Rhodes seeks the approval of the St. Louis fans before painfully twisting Flair's leg. In St. Louis he will get it, in the Mid-Atlantic he would not. Ric's popularity in the Carolinas could ultimately harm his career.

broad smile as he recalled details of the match. "I was all over Rhodes like a panther. There were times I snagged him in a headlock or something, and he was just totally helpless. I'm convinced that if I had another shot at him like that I could steal away his belt!"

Again, though, consideration of the fans comes into play. If he is going to make a play for the title, what about the fans?

"Well, like I say, I love my fans here in the Carolinas," said Flair. "But it's a strange thing. They're my fans, and they're the best that you could hope for anywhere. But I just don't feel completely comfortable wrestling in front of my fans."

"It's not that they demand too much out of me, but it's just that they are so devoted, that I really feel I owe it to them to provide the

kind of performance that they came for. If I have to alter my style one bit because I'm in the ring with a champion who is putting his title on the line, I feel that I am cheating them from the match they expect out of me."

"By the same token," continued Flair, "if I step into the ring with the champion, I owe it to myself to try to get that title. A championship shot doesn't come up every day, so when they do, I really feel that I should make the best of it."

This is Flair's dilemma: the fans or the title. A choice in favor for either one would be a choice that degrades the other far more than is necessary. Yet, eventually Flair must come to grips with his problem and decide once and for all which path he is choosing, and which choice he will ultimately reject. □

IVAN KOLOFF

(Continued from Page 48)

I hold on to my belt for so long."

What one must remember, however, is that when Koloff says "only try to win match," that means try to win match at any cost. Usually, the first casualty is any sense of order within the squared circle. The second casualty is often the unfortunate opponent of Koloff. The third casualty is never his Mid-Atlantic title.



Koloff battles Wahoo McDaniel in 1975. The two still battle today, but note how much trimmer Koloff has become

"I am champion now, and I will be so for a long time," roars the mighty Russian. "I will defend my championship against any and all people who try to take it from me. Let them try and take it, and they know what strong defense means. They will face trouble. That is the way it should be. A championship is hard thing to hold, hard to keep . . . it should also be very hard to win."

With Ivan Koloff guarding the belt, there is no question that the Mid-Atlantic title is hard to win. More than one wrestler has been sent from a title challenge back to his dressing room to tend his wounds. It is likely that in the future, more will follow. ☐

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RINGSIDE

(Continued from Page 8)



Captain Lou Albano confidently predicts that the team of Mr. Fuji (above) and Mr. Saito will become his 11th tag team champions. Ric Flair (below) would like another crack at NWA champion Dusty Rhodes.



take the belts so far?

"As you know, the Captain is a genius," Albano replied. "I just wanted my men to feel out the situation, maybe get themselves disqualified tryin' to kill the bums. That way they have instilled fear in the hearts of Garea and Martel. So much fear, that the next time they meet my men, they will be unable to wrestle, merely forfeit the belts."

Ric Flair has appealed to the NWA for a rematch with NWA champion Dusty Rhodes. Ric feels he made a few mistakes in their last outing and will definitely win the title from Dusty with a second opportunity... Laurent Soucie is a good prospect for AWA Rookie of the Year honors... Kevin Von Erich is wrestling in Georgia, while Kerry continues to be active in Louisiana. Brother David is keeping things in line in Texas.

Bruiser Brody and John Studd



Ken Patera, who walked away from his Georgia championship because of a "lack of competition," is negotiating with AWA promoters.

both claim that they are the men responsible for breaking the arm of Blackjack Mulligan Sr. . . . AWA champion Nick Bockwinkel is contemplating a tour of Tennessee. If he does go there, he will have to wrestle Jerry Lawler and Bill Dundee.

A feud that has been going on for years in several parts of the country has now surfaced in Montreal. As soon as Dino Bravo heard that John Studd was wrestling there, he packed his bags and went after the big man. After three matches, each of which ended in a double-disqualification verdict, promoters are hesitant to sign them again, fearing they will kill each other.

Ken Patera, the man who claims to have retired the Georgia title, is negotiating with AWA promoters.

"Maybe they can find me some real competition," Patera says. "I got sick of beating up little Tommy Rich and that senile Mr. Wrestling II. If I can't get any good matches there, I might as well quit."

That's all for now. See you at the matches! □

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HULK HOGAN

(Continued from Page 45)

award and bring it to the engraver. A call did come in, however, relating the fact that he had car trouble and would not be able to make it in: All four tires had been slashed.

The official asked his secretary to have the engraving done utilizing a contingency plan located in a secret panel in his bottom desk drawer.

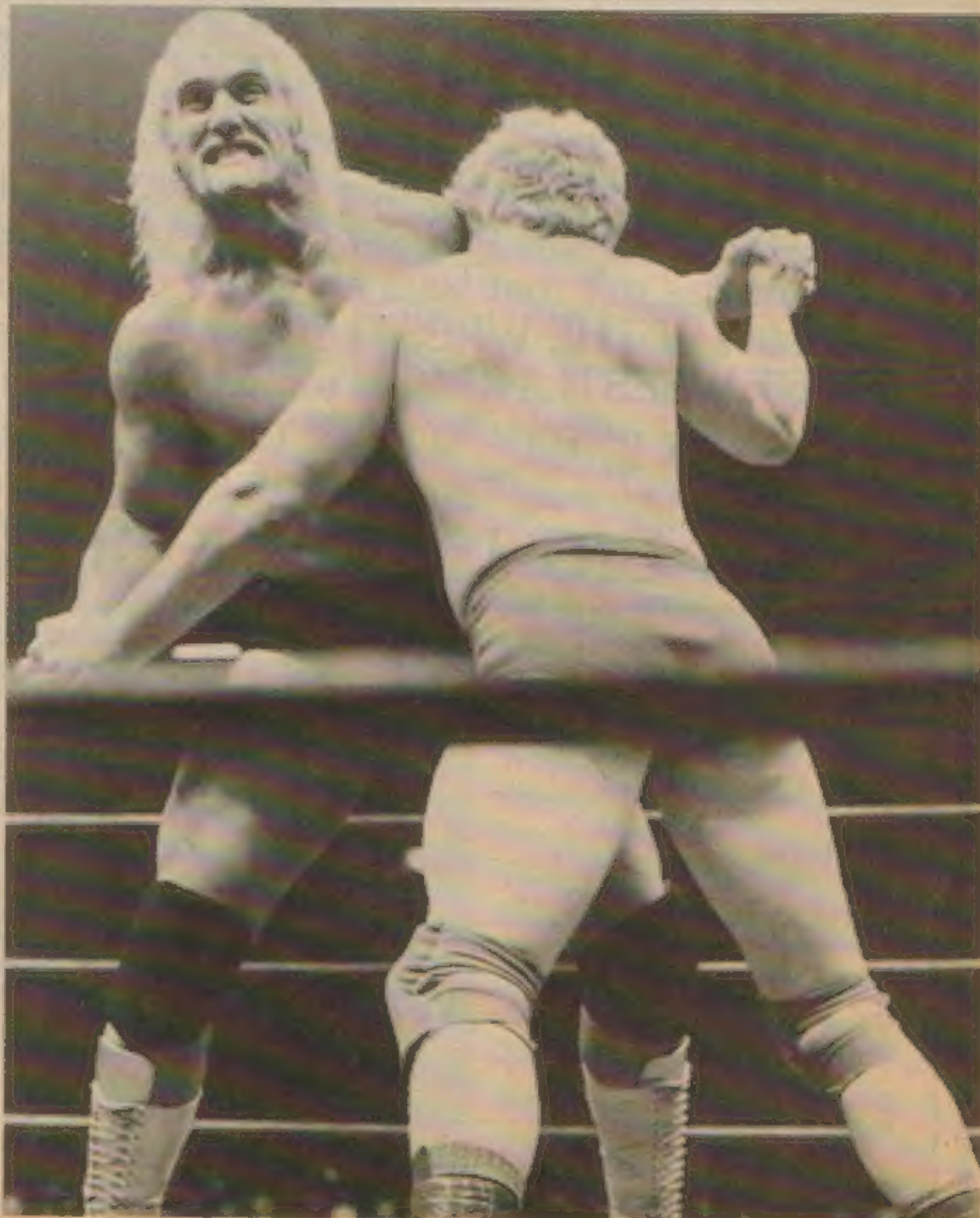
As the secretary went to put the key into the lock of the glass case to withdraw the award, she realized that the award had already been engraved with the

winner's name. She surmised that

the other secretary in the office must have taken care of the problem, and went home for the rest of the day. It appeared as if the plan concocted by the Hogan forces was going to be successful.

Then came Sunday evening. Nearly 200 people were on hand for the ceremony, and there was electricity in the air. Most observers had narrowed the field down to two possible recipients: Bob Backlund and Hulk Hogan. Everyone was waiting to see who the actual winner was going to be.

As the moderator of the Hogan uses his height to take command in a test of strength with Backlund (below) and then flings the WWF champion across the ring (opposite right). Backlund retained his claim to the WWF crown—and also the coveted International Trophy.



evening's ceremonies strode to the podium, a silence quickly fell upon the crowd. The International Trophy was one award around which much speculation and ego manipulation had been centered. The winner of it would hold bragging rights over all other wrestlers who had appeared in Japan over the past year. It is a hotly contested and desired prize.



A few preliminary speeches were delivered, and the audience grew restless. Then, a large object veiled in purple velvet was brought to the forefront: the Trophy!

A gesture by the moderator to silence the people, and a hush fell quickly. The announcement came swiftly as the purple sheath was removed to reveal the winner of the International Trophy: Bob Backlund!

A cheer rang through the hall as Backlund ran to the podium sporting a boyish grin. As he climbed the three steps to the microphone, Hulk Hogan's voice bellowed angrily: "That trophy belongs to me!" Four wrestlers quickly silenced Hogan from any further outbursts.

In his acceptance speech, Backlund noted that "this is one of the proudest days of my life," after which he stared straight into the eyes of Hulk Hogan and winked knowingly. As far as Hogan was concerned, it was probably one of the most embarrassing evenings of his life. ☐

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